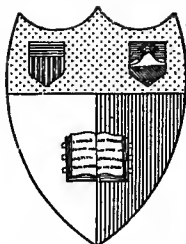


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THOMAS A'BECKET:

A Tragedy

IN FIVE ACTS.

EV

NEW YORK.

DICK & FITZGERALD, 18 ANN STREET.

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A Tragedy

IN FIVE ACTS.

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THOMAS A'BECKET.

A TRAGEDY, IN FIVE ACTS.

PERSONS OF THE DRAMA.

THOMAS A'BECKET.

SIR JOHN OF SALISBURY, }
SIR PETER OF BLOIS, } His friends.

ALBERT and HUGH, his attendants.

HENRY II. of England.

LORD FITZURSE, Henry's favorite.

LORDS DE BROO, DE MOREVILLE, DE TRACY.

SIR RICHARD BRITO.

REGINALD DE WARRENNE.

GERVASE DE CORNHILL.

EARLS LEICESTER and CORNWALL.

BISHOPS OF LONDON, SALISBURY, WORCESTER, WINCHESTER, and YORK.

SIR RICHARD DE HASTINGS, Grand Prior of England's Knights Templars,
then 70 years of age.

PHILIP OF ROME, Legate.

SIR GUY DE LUSIGNAN, Knight of Flanders.

KNIGHTS OF FRANCE.

LUCILLE, Niece of A'Becket.

MATILDE, Cousin to Lucille.

LORDS and LADIES.

TIME :

Reign of Henry II. of England, A. D. 1163-1170. Scene lies in England,
Flanders, and France.)

A'BECKET.

ACT I.

SCENE FIRST.

Sea-shore after a storm—Fragments of a wreck.

SIR RICHARD BRITO *and* LORD FITZURSE *enter from opposite sides.*

BRITO.

What means this haste, my Lord?

FITZURSE.

Hast thou not heard?

A'Becket and the King are foes.

BRITO.

A'Becket and the King! those late dear friends!
They cannot long be foes: A'Becket is too great
Not to forgive his wrongs; the King too weak,
In these wild troublous times, in men of mighty intellect.
He feels it, Sir; we feel it, Sir, though we do hate
The man who so o'ertops us. You, in the brief recital,
Teach this fact—saying, “A'Becket and the King
Are sworn foes”—see, how the priest comes first;
So stands he in the thoughts of every man.

FITZURSE.

And yet I've heard that he was humbly born,
But rose so fast, that, like the young fledgling,
Soars too high at first—singeing his wings

He weakened them, and now, full grown,
They will not bear him up—hunter and hawker
As he is—this churlish priest, born for the torment
Of the Anglo-Norman race. A tradesman's son,
No more—

BRITO.

A tradesman's son! Know, my young Lord,
His father was a warrior too, as honest, Sir,
As brave—and honesty makes any trade
An honor; and more, his mother, tho' of another clime,
Owned gentle blood. When a mere boy,
He was sent to Rome by Theobald, Archbishop
Then of England, and straightway from His Holiness
Bore letters, prohibiting the crowning
Of the late King Stephen's son—thus firmly
Seating Henry on his throne:—thereafter
Soon appointed England's High Chancellor
And prince Henry's preceptor. Courtier complete,
Unbounded revenues, with seven hundred knights
And twelve hundred horsemen in his pay—
A regal state—he made the campaign
To Toulouse. Next he was to Paris sent, to treat
Of an alliance between the young daughter
Of France's king and our Prince Henry. Ay, and re-
turned

With her to England. *He never failed.*

A tradesman's son, you say—his craft he ne'er forgot.
Then Theobald died—whom to the primacy
Could Henry raise but him, the great A'Becket?
First primate sprung from Anglo-Saxon race;
Honored and treasured by all of Saxon blood;
Received by Welsh with the most loud acclaim,
Their first Lord Primate under Norman rule—
For though I hate him, I must own him great.

The King till now did love him well—

Of strife?

What is the cause

FITZURSE.

Unto the Pope he hath complained
Of the laity's infringement of the Church's rights;
And his assent refusing to the Constitutions
Of Clarendon, has fled to France. The King
At Northampton holds his court to-morrow;
His counsellors are all summoned.

BRITO.

This I for many a day have feared.
Go you not to the chase? our Liege at noon
Rides forth. Yet stay—who have we here? Lord Salis-
bury,
Storm-worn and sad!

Enter LORD JOHN of SALISBURY.

You here, my Lord, in this dark hour?
Methought the air of France ere this did fan your brow.
What news from Lord A'Becket?

SALISBURY.

None, none; but adverse winds
Have raged since England's Primate set sail
For France. How fares our Liege to-day?

BRITO.

Right well.

He's for the chase at noon, whither I haste
To wait on him—let's on, Fitzurse—Farewell, Lord Salis-
bury!

[BRITO and FITZURSE *Exeunt.*

SALISBURY.

Farewell, most valiant lords—mad King, sad minister;
Oh! where will this day's business end, his favorite

Long, now fallen and fled! These Norman lords
Ne'er loved the Saxon priest—but his great genius
Bowed them to his will. Queen Eleanor
Never loved her King—hates him—
While she lives, she'll never cease to work their ill.
Meet helpmate has she proved to England's King;
Her uncle's mistress and the Turk's light of love—
For this, repudiated by Louis "the young."
Our Norman King, to rule her wide domains,
After six weeks made her his queen,
Bartering his honor and his happiness.
I see her hand in this; she wooed A'Becket's love,
And won his deep despite—return like this,
No woman e'er forgave.

Here have I sought
Since yesternight for those would brave the fury
Of the storm, and bear these letters to my wronged friend,
England's great Primate—great in his youth
In feats of arms, learned in legendary lore,
Foremost in the court and camp, and first in Henry's favor
Till he bade him wear the Primate's robes—
Then he foretold this hour! It's now three days
Since he set sail for France, in all which time
A tempest fierce hath raged, with winds adverse
To him—as though fate would not he should leave
His land. But lo! a sail! Mayhap it bears him back.
I'll to their aid. [*Exeunt.*]

SIR PETER of BLOIS *enters, his garments wet and soiled.*

SIR PETER.

A'Becket shipwrecked on his native shore!
He who hath piloted through so many a storm!
It augurs ill for him. Is there no end
To his great cares? Alas! I fear me, none,

For e'en the elements seem opposed to him.
No sooner had we left this mighty realm,
Albion's white cliffs slumbering in virgin beauty,
Than, robed in mist, all faded from our view,
And fierce old ocean, with a lion's roar,
Struck panic 'mid the seamen. So we who hoped
In France to feast to-day, must break our fast
In turmoil and in strife.

SALISBURY *enters.*

Who comes? What! you, my friend?

SALISBURY.

Welcome, thrice welcome, tho' in such sad plight!
Thank Heaven, you have weathered out the storm.
How fare you, Sir, and our great friend, A'Becket?

BLOIS.

As well as ever, though in wisdom wiser.
We left the port with favoring gales,
But soon the scene was changed; an angry sea
Tossed our poor bark, like bittern, o'er its waves,
While she with true heart breasted all their force,
And still obedient to the helmsman's rule,
After three days' fierce conflict with the storm,
Though stranded on yon shore, is sound as ever,
Ready again to cope with them.
This was for us, my friend. It bids us brave
The storms of fate, though we are backward driven
By their force. What did you here?

SALISBURY.

I waited

Till the storm should lull, these papers to dispatch to you
The King had just rode forth unto the chase,
When news was ta'en him, A'Becket and his friends
Had fled to France. Thereon he ordered

A great council to be held at Northampton,
And questioned why he left—asking
If the same realm could not contain them both.

BLOIS.

No, Sir John, never while things are thus ;
A'Becket must yield or combat with him manfully ;
The last it *must* be. There is no choice but this.

[*Pauses.*

Heard I aright? Gone forth unto the chase?
How can he wear a heart so light in hour
Like this? 'Tis ever thus among the great
In power, that one man's sorrow proves
Some other's joy. So he now revels—riots
In his misery. Who have been with you
Since I left?

SALISBURY.

Young Lords Fitzurse and Brito.

BLOIS.

Fitzurse! You entertained him as a friend ;
Though in the service of a foe, his heart
Inclines to us.

SALISBURY.

Even so methinks, my Lord ;
But come—let's to A'Becket's home, where all
Do anxiously wait news of him.

BLOIS.

We will—when there, we must prepare a numerous suite
To wait on him to Northampton. 'Twere well
To make a goodly show of friends.

[*Exeunt.*

SCENE SECOND.

Gothic Hall.

A'BECKET—*alone.*

So much for being willing slave to power !
Had I but sought my pleasure and my weal,
Forgetting his, whose shadow I have been,
Not his thought my thought, his every wish my act,
All had been well !

But no, not so ; I, to enhance
His glory, wealth, and power, to jealous envy
Have exposed myself, and now must fall
Even like Lucifer, lost in the radiance
I have heralded !

Be firm, my heart, be firm !

'Tis envy speaks !

The tale while told sounds loudly,
But palls when probed, bringing dishonor
On the babbler's head !

'Tis weightless as the story
The old man tells, walking in second childishness.
Why should I be moved ? Silence, thou petty voice,
I will not deign to note their idle words.
But, ha ! a step—

No gentle, sylphlike step ;
I hoped my child's. They do approach—

Retires one side.]

I'll note them here.

FITZURSE *enters, looking round.*

FITZURSE.

How reverend is the air pervades these halls !
How like their great inhabitant, time furrowed !
Firm they stand, ready to cope with fiercest elements.

Oh! 'tis a noble house! fit home for such a heart;
 Would it were tuned to softer measures,
 That his step might move in harmony
 With his king's. Gone, gone to France. I would
 It were not so—for something tells me that my fate
 And thine, great soul! are linked together.

A voice! a step! [A'BECKET *comes forward*.

What! thou, our Lord Archbishop!
 Welcome, my reverend father, to your own land!
 No home like this for you.

A'BECKET.

Much moved.] Thanks, thanks, my son.
 My Liege—How fares my Liege?

FITZURSE.

Well; save in wanting you.

A'BECKET.

My King! my King! to think it should be thus!
 But he required I should assume this office—
 And I obeyed amid the formal greetings
 Of the Lord Bishops, who ever hated me.
 Then with my office I straightway changed
 My robes, my habits, and my home; fasting
 Where I had feasted; no more proud Norman's favorite;
 Saxon born, I was the people's friend.

But stay, whom have we here?

MATILDE and LUCILLE enter, with cloaks on.

MATILDE, *embracing him*.

My uncle, my dear uncle!

A'BECKET.

What! bravest thou the storm?

FITZURSE.

Angelic maids!

A'BECKET, *embracing Lucille.*

Thou too, my fair Lucille! What did you there?

LUCILLE.

I sought, with dear Matilde, tidings of you, my Lord.

FITZURSE, *aside.*

And then, to wend to heaven.

A'BECKET.

My blessings be with you.

Daughters, my Lord Fitzurse!

FITZURSE.

Fair ladies, at your service.

FITZURSE, MATILDE, and LUCILLE *retire one side; on the other enter* RICHARD DE HASTINGS *and* PHILIP OF ROME, *with attendants and great show of friends.*

HASTINGS.

Our service, my Lord Archbishop.

A'BECKET.

Aside.]

This Norman Lord!

To them.] You're welcome, Sirs.

Pray, what may be your errand?

A noble one it should be, that is borne

By the Grand Prior of England's Knights Templars.

HASTINGS.

'Tis from your King I come; grieved deeply

By your hasty course, and much moved withal,

His language is, "That his loyal subjects

Ever observe his will;"—that he requires

Your consent to these the Constitutions

Of Clarendon.

[*Produces scroll.*

Then reads—]

"Which do provide, that all control of church as well as

state, should be intrusted to the civil courts. Her clerks, accused of any crime, be tried by them. No clergy leave the realm without consent of King. That excommunicates should not be bound to give security for their continuance in some fixed abode. That all appeals, in causes spiritual, be carried from the Primate to the King, making his judgment final. That the Archbishops, Bishops, and other spiritual dignitaries should be regarded as Barons of the realm, possess their privileges and be subjected to the burdens of that rank—to attend the King in his Great Councils and assist at all trials criminal. The revenues of vacant Sees to belong to the King; and that the clergy no longer pretend to the right of enforcing payment of debts contracted by oath or promise, but should leave these lawsuits, equally with other, to the determination of the civil courts; and that the sons of villeins be not clerks ordained without their lord's consent."

A'BECKET.

Requires he this? My Lords, you know not what you ask;
Go, raze our churches, chapels, convents, ay, our homes,
Expel the clergy from his vast domains,
And you could do no worse!

Nor is his message

Couched in gentle words, although, my Lord,
In your delivery it loses its sharper part;
Still would I that you had not borne it.
Your office is not raised in my esteem—
Degraded to the messenger of an angry King,
For passion urges this, and as kings are
Above their fellow-men, so should they be
Above their frailties; but I would learn
What further he designs.

HASTINGS.

Pray, be not moved, my noble Lord Archbishop:
First, he commands you, his late Primate—

A'BECKET, *hastily*.

His late Primate! who may he be?
Who was the Primate is the Primate still.

HASTINGS.

Such was his word, and he requires you surrender
Instantly the Castles of Eye and Berkham,
With all their honors, and deliver up
The culprit, now in your hands, charged
With such grave offence, in wedding
Lord Rupert's daughter.

A'BECKET.

Unequal birth his only fault—would at some mightier's
gate

No graver lay! does he so soon forget fam'd Rosamond,
So fair! so frail! the only daughter of De Clifford,
Our great Saxon Lord, the prop and stay
Of his old age, degraded to the leman
Of his Norman King, to whom he was too faithful?
Accursed was the day when Harold fell,
For sin hath shadowed all our ways since then!
But stay, bear this from A'Becket of Canterbury
To Henry of England, King but by accident
Of birth: say that I neither will surrender aught,
Nor yield unto his will.

Whence is his power
That he should trample upon me, in all
His equal, save in honors?

PHILIP OF ROME.

My Lord Archbishop, pray be advised;
Beware a breach with King so powerful.

A'BECKET.

Philip of Rome, we, Anglo-Saxon born,
Are free by nature, as the wind that blows;

We bow no suppliant knee to power,
Save 'tis the *power of mind*!
The poorest hind may bear the proudest head
That walks unsceptred through the land.
Genius may rear her throne beneath the hovel's roof,
And there her worshippers in crowds will kneel.
I am the people's friend, the lordlings' foe,
When arrogance marks their steps—go, Sirs,
And tell the King I will not yield!

HASTINGS.

I fear, Archbishop, this is ill advised;
He is enraged with what has passed already.

A'BECKET, *much moved*.

Well, let him be enraged: what's that to me?
Why should I heed his anger? Leave him awhile,
And he'll grow calm and cool. The hardest steel
Not long retains its heat; the mettled steed
Will soonest tamely yield, outworn by his own spirit.

HASTINGS.

Those honors, my dear Lord, they are of mighty value.
Pray be advised! We would not have you lose
Your high estate, and all its great attendants.

A'BECKET, *aside*.

They are moved, the coward hearts! 'Tis for themselves
They fear. My privileges curtailed, where are their own?
Aloud.]

My high estate! my honors! Who can disrobe me of them?
They were born with me, with me shall die! My office
I would resign as easily as I lay aside
This robe—[*aside.*] In faith, I find that it is somewhat
worn,

I would a newer, if not plainer guise.

HASTINGS.

All England, Sir, would mourn your loss.

A'BECKET.

And so she should, for England holds me in her chains;
I am the veriest slave that ever lived.

No mother ever felt more pangs, than I

For England—there's not a churl in all the land,

But I am bound to him by bands of adamant,

My heart-strings webbed in his—

King's gifts I value not.

To PHILIP OF ROME.]

What say you, Prelate?

PHILIP OF ROME.

Give him his way.

A'BECKET.

Never!

So help me Heaven!

Enter EARLS of LEICESTER and CORNWALL.

What would ye, noble Sirs?

CORNWALL.

That you should let King Henry have his will.

A'BECKET.

You too, my Lords! I had hoped else than this.

In you I had confided, till the waters rose

E'en to their highest height.

Aside.]

Ah! well I know

A dove's upon the wing, comes from a storm-proof ark.

Aloud.]

I may not give him way—for nothing then will satisfy.

The Barons all are his—the Bishops, overawed,

Dare not oppose his will. Leicester and Cornwall,

Ye know not what you do.

HASTINGS casts himself on his knees before A'BECKET.

HASTINGS.

Father, upon my knees,
I do beseech you yield. I never knelt before
To any man.

A'BECKET.

Arise, and never kneel again,
Save unto God. [HASTINGS rises.]

What judgment tells me's wrong,
Entreaties never will make right.

HASTINGS.

If you regard your or your Church's safety,
Provoke him not—'twere vain, my Lord—fruitless,
All opposition. He, on his purpose bent,
Will have revenge on all who dare oppose.

A'BECKET.

My Lord, you know me not. I have no fears—
To yield my will, of all things, most I dread.
A dangerous precedent it would be
Both to myself and King; for unto me
Succeeding trials would each easier seem,
And I should yield, until my resolution
All was lost—while unto him 'twould be
Removal of the sole restraint upon his lawless will.
My Lords, I love my King (we were as brothers
Till this hapless hour), and cannot see him leap
Into the gulf of his mad hot desires.

[Lords confer aside.]

A'BECKET, aside.

Should I now yield, what will my country gain?
Yet is it wise, beggared to be of power,—
That which, of all things, least I'd bear to lose?
I cannot, will not, whatsoe'er the cost.

HASTINGS.

My Lord, you are alone in this.

A'BECKET.

My Lord!

'Tis virtue! and I would rather be alone
With her, than compassed round by all the hosts
Of vice. Of all my friends, are there none left?
Not one. [*Aside.*] The wise man to the whirlwind bows
His head.

[*Aloud*] I will attend the Court.

Farewell! farewell!

[*Exit Lords on one side—A'BECKET and friends on the
other side.*]

SCENE THIRD.

Grand Council Room at Northampton—Throne with steps—Range of
seats for Lords.

BRITO.

Where are your thoughts, Fitzurse?

FITZURSE.

In heaven.

BRITO.

In heaven! that's strange, indeed, in you.
What took them there?

FITZURSE.

The sight of one newly come thence
To earth—the fairest being ever eye beheld.

BRITO.

Indeed; whose house may't be is worthy such
A visitant?

FITZURSE.

Thou'lt rival me, I fear.

BRITO.

Indeed, not I; who is this paragon?

FITZURSE.

None other than A'Becket's niece.

BRITO.

A'Becket's niece!

Banish that thought, my Lord. The King will frown
On this new fancy.

FITZURSE.

Well! let him frown!

I live not in the fear of kingly ire.

BRITO.

Love makes you bold, young Lord. Oh, clip its wings
Before it takes too wild a flight—

Lo, where he comes,

And angered too, 'twould seem.

FITZURSE.

'Tis with A'Becket. [*Aside.*] Oh cruel, cursed fate!
That my youth's follies do compel this service
To the King, while fair Lucille, A'Becket's niece,
Reigns my heart's queen. [*Aloud.*] My Liege.

Enter HENRY and his Court. He ascends the throne.

HENRY.

Where stays this priest? Summon him hither on the instant—

Kings wait not on their subjects' pleasure.

FITZURSE.

He comes, my Liege, clothed in his robes of office
As Lord Archbishop—bearing the silver cross.

HENRY.

Why comes he thus?

FITZURSE.

It is St. Stephen's Day.

HENRY.

So hath it been for years, yet never came he thus.
Bishop of London, preside you here.

My Lords temporal,
Attend on me—the judgment we will await
Within—or I to be the King shall cease,
Or he to be Archbishop.

As HENRY leaves the throne A'BECKET enters, holding the silver cross before him, and takes his seat in silence; his friends behind him, all magnificently attired.

LONDON.

My Lord Archbishop, why do you come
Thus armed with the silver cross?

LORD.

'Tis in defiance
Of our Liege, your coming thus into his Court.
But he has a sword whose point is sharper far
Than that of your pastoral staff.

A'BECKET.

Where is my King? He should preside to-day;
'Tis so prescribed by "Customs of the Realm."

LONDON.

Displeased with your approach in such unseemly mode,
He doth pass judgment in the inner Court.

A'BECKET.

Unseemly mode! the Church protects her own—
She is my Counsellor—unto her I trust.
Justice hath fled this realm. [LEICESTER enters.]

LEICESTER.

My Lord, enraged, he swears
He'll be revenged. Oh pray, have pity
On yourself and brethren. Provoke him now
No more.

A'BECKET.

What words are these before the Great Council
Of the realm!

Aside.] Nay, rather let him not provoke me more.

CORNWALL *enters*.

CORNWALL.

It is determined, by the King's privy council,
You be impeached of perjury and high treason.
The first, in that you observe not the Constitutions
Of Clarendon—the last, in that you disobey
His orders.

A'BECKET.

What! have I then no friends?

CORNWALL.

You have your King, for this he doth reject,
And but demands that you shall subject stand
Unto the Court's judgment, in the pecuniary charges.

A'BECKET.

This, too, I do refuse—the judgment
Of no temporal court will I obey.

FITZURSE *enters.*] What more?

FITZURSE.

My Lord, the King's permission
By the Bishops is besought, that, on the score of perjury,
They to Rome, against you, may appeal. To this
He doth consent.

A'BECKET.

The Bishops, say you?

Am I then prejudged without a hearing?

'Tis enough, I mark what you do say.

Aside.]

Ay, mark it well. 'Tis fitting, very fitting,
You, whose features wear *her* lineaments,

Whom Henry wronged, as me, he wrongeth now,
Should bear this message of his tyranny—
Thus searing our wrongs upon my heart.
Alas! poor Rosamond!

LEICESTER.

The Peers, besides, do you pronounce
Guilty of perjury and high treason ;
But still, the alternative allow
Of rendering your accounts, and settling
Any balance now against you.

Do this, my Lord,
Or hear from me your sentence.

A'BECKET, *starting and rising*.

My sentence, ere you've tried me? Why, I
Can charges bring will crush you with their sounding,
Though ye are backed by hosts of friends,
While I've but one—my well-known "Truth,"
Which is far stronger in its single strength
Than all King Henry's power.

Tho' I have ventured
On an unquiet sea, I'll brave its utmost fury.
The adder is not malignant, yet, too closely press'd,
May turn and sting the heel.
My sentence! Ye vain, proud Lords, ye have not words
In your vocabulary to frame my fitting judgment;
Ye minions of a King who has roused a lion
That he dare not face!
My sentence, Sirs, is written in the skies ;
It is recorded on the azure vault of heaven ;
Its letters the glittering stars—heralds
Of my future glories.

As easy might
Yon angry sea, whose wildest waves,

E'en in its fiercest rage, are stayed by this rock-bound
shore,
Strive to wash out what is recorded there—
I have no measure for such meanness!

ALL.

Do you hear him?

A'BECKET *turns to go, when a clamor is raised against him. He steps back and says—*

What noise is this? Oh, were it not forbidden
By my orders, with arms I would defend myself.

The doors of the apartment in which the King is sitting are now thrown open, and A'BECKET discovers a body of Knights, with their garments tucked up and their swords drawn, when HENRY approaches him hastily, and exclaims—

HENRY.

So! so! Sir Priest. What! this unto ourselves?
My Lords, we deem it fitting we should revive
The customs and usages of our grandsire.
What think ye, Sirs?

LORDS.

We do assent.

A'BECKET.

And we—saving the honor of God,
And of the Holy Church.

HENRY.

There is venom
In that reservation. We will no more with thee.
Here is a special messenger from the Pope,
In answer to my prayer. He, with letters
Apostolical, enjoins all prelates, and more
Especially you of Canterbury, to accept and
Observe all the King of England's laws.

Choose here upon the instant—Compliance,
Exile, or death.

A'BECKET, *pointing to heaven.*

My Liege, my hour has not yet come.

Aside.]

All armed,

And ready for the act? A forced compliance
Will not bind “the rights of our order”—and as on them
Hangs the sole hope the Anglo-Saxon people have
Against this Norman monarch's fierce assaults,
I'll wear these robes, proof-armor in their cause,
And with religion on our side, the sole true friend
Of Liberty, I will assert—maintain their rights.
I will consent—straightway to France, and thence
To His High Holiness, appeal from this.

Aloud to the Court.]

Prepare these Constitutions.

HENRY.

This is well.

ALL

Long live our King and Bishop.

END OF ACT I.

ACT II.

SCENE FIRST.

France—An Anteroom—Gold and Blue.

MATILDE enters with LUCILLE.

MATILDE.

In faith, Lucille, our refuge here in France
Doth seem more like triumphal entry of hero fam'd
Than fallen favorites' flight—such troops of friends
Attend us on our way. Oh, banish, sweet,
From thy once radiant brow the sombre hue
Now rests there. You'll make me sad, dear girl.
Indeed you will.

LUCILLE.

Never, dear cousin, with a willing heart.

MATILDE.

Willing or no, it matters not, Lucille,
My heart is ever mirror unto thine.
So cheer thee, love—thy suitors would not know
The face they once adored. What's the romance
The gay Lord Fitzurse [*Lucille starts*] sang, when last
we feasted
By sweet Avon's side? Sing me one line, 'twill bring
To memory all those scenes of joy in which we revell'd,
And, as gay lark's song heralds the smile of dawn,
Wake from its dreams thy mournful pensive eye.
These knights of France are rich in all may win
The heart of beauty, and well I know
Full many a lance will break for thee,
Lucille.

LUCILLE.

And break in vain!

MATILDE.

Why so? How? Sighs and tears!
What is the cause of this? Of late I've mark'd
You're much alone, in shady walks, or where
The silver moon sheds her pale light. What is't?
Dost love? Thou'rt moved! Who is the knight whose
 badge
Thy heart doth wear? Tell me, sweet girl; I know
Thou lovest!

LUCILLE.

'Tis true, and am beloved.

Nor were I sad, but he in whom I live
Now mourns by Avon's bank his absent love.
His name, Matilde, I long have long'd to tell,
But that my heart's so jealous of his worth,
I would not e'en the air of heaven
Should know its precious secret.

MATILDE.

Know I its lord?

If so, how sweet we shall commune together,
Unfolding to each other our hearts' treasures;
For I a secret have, dearer to me than life.
It shall be thine—thine given me in turn.

LUCILLE.

Is't so? Fitzurse—his name.

MATILDE.

The noble, generous youth
We love so much? He who cours'd o'er the heath
Of Hounslow to our support?

LUCILLE.

The same.

MATILDE.

Why, thou hast known him but one little month.

LUCILLE.

One little month? So full of joys it was,
That, when I count them o'er, all else of life
Seems but one little speck, except, except
The last few days, which are as centuries.
Dost wonder that I am sad?

MATILDE.

Nay, dearest, rather wonder I that floods
Of tears marked not our swift departure,
When, all so unprepared, thy heart was rooted
From the soil it loved, to pine away afar.
But cheer thee now, thou shalt not miss him long;
He shall be summoned to attend our train.

LUCILLE.

Thanks, thanks, my dear Matilde; but he, you know,
Doth wait upon the King.

MATILDE.

Nay, nay, you say the Queen of Beauty
Rules his heart. She owns not a divided service.
If Fitzurse loves thee, what is Henry's will
Weighed against Love's commands? All things
Oppose its ardent calls, are but as rushes in its path.
He'll straightway come to France.

LUCILLE.

Then wilt thou see my face decked, like the morn
Of May, in the fair flowers thou so lovest, Matilde;
My heart will be as blithe as linnet's,
And the whole livelong day thou'lt hear my song;
My steps the gentle fawn's shall all outvie;
And in my smile, mirrored, shall be thine own.

The sweetest ever seen by man,
In their richest beauty. Thy lover is—

MATILDE.

The Lord of Blois. He whose wit is soul
Of merry meetings, and from whose sage discourse
Wisdom itself might learn.

But soon they'll come—
Our aged uncle and my own true knight. [Exeunt.]

SCENE SECOND.

Stone-Vaulted Hall.

A'BECKET.

This then is my reward for years of toil!
Oh! thou poor King, semblance of majesty!
To use armed force against a cowed monk!
My pity doth outweigh my hate for thee.
How soft the air of France! The breeze that did accord
With words of hate, with voice of love doth harmonize.
Bright omen this—herald of joys to come;
Her King must smile, for many is the favor
I have rendered him; nor will brave Philip frown,
For him I have served in diverse manners.
But what of that? Mankind of woman born
Never knew gratitude, since the first mother
Of us all rebelled and ate forbidden fruit,
Though Eden teemed with all most fair and good.
No, no, 'tis not to this I'll look; jealous they grow
Of England's King, and I will nurse this plant
Till it o'ershadows every other thought.
Rome's Pontiff, too, doth feel but little love
For him who so invades his rights.

Enter JOHN OF SALISBURY.

Who comes?

SALISBURY.

Your pardon, Father, if that I intrude.

A'BECKET.

Welcome, my son; when to our friends at home
You write, use Saxon names, lest that our letters
Intercepted, disguise be needful for their safety.

SALISBURY.

I shall, my Lord; but now a knight of Flanders
Attends your leisure. He comes intrusted
With kind messages.

A'BECKET.

Is't so? Give him a hearty welcome,
And, when refreshed, escort him to my room.

SALISBURY.

France, too, doth join in her regards. My Lord of Blois
Now greets her messengers.

A'BECKET.

France too! Methinks the sun does shine
To-day! Go you with haste and give them welcome.

[*Exit* SALISBURY.]

Flanders and France! one more and all Fate's frowns
Are flown; thus she, who seemed a very shrew
To me, angelic maid will be. Ere they arrive
I'll summon my Lucille, for suffering beauty
More doth move the heart than ever did
The care-marked face of age. Albert! ho! Albert!

Enter ALBERT.]

Bid my lady nieces attend me here,
As messengers from France and Flanders
Have arrived, and I would they should welcome
Them.

[*Exit* ALBERT.]

Farewell, pale care! welcome, rose-cheeked joy!
Once more, as in my boyhood's hour, my heart
Doth gayly beat.

Louis of France, my heartfelt thanks
To you; and Philip of Flanders, success
Attend you ever—this hour shall Henry rue.

Enter MATILDE, LUCILLE, and PETER OF BLOIS.

MATILDE.

How fares my uncle?

A'BECKET.

Well, dearest child; and thou, the same?
But this were needless, for thy smile assents
In terms more speaking than thy tongue could lisp.
My fair Lucille! Thou art not well, my child—
But soon the air of France will call its wonted color
To thy cheek.

Do those Lords attend?

BLOIS.

They do.

A'BECKET.

Say I await them here.

[*Exit* BLOIS.]

My daughters dear, season your welcome
As best becomes ye. I'd take by storm
These noble hearts, for first impressions
Are like first bounds of steeds, that start
Upon a race, which, feebly made, compel
Much after toil, else they ne'er reach the goal.
They come.

BLOIS *ushers in* LORDS OF FRANCE AND FLANDERS.

BLOIS.

From Flanders and from France, my Lord,
These gallant knights bring messages of love.

A'BECKET.

Welcome, welcome, gentlemen.

Sir Guy de Lusignan !

Nobles of France, he is well known to you,
For Fame did with one breath proclaim you all
Her own.

To LUSIGNAN.]

My youth's fond playfellow !

Accept my welcome, and my thanks—thanks
From a heart o'erflowing—for this remembrance
Of thy sunshine's friend.

SIR GUY.

Friends in misfortune

Are the only friends the great man e'er should boast.
There ever are a thousand motes live in his sunbeams,
But when shadows fall, they darkling fade away.
Most noble Primate, our service unto you,
And our King's welcome.

A'BECKET.

Thanks, my Lord, thanks to him

And you. My niece Lucille ; Matilde, her friend
And cousin.

LORD OF FRANCE.

Ever at your service, Ladies fair.

Aside.]

How passing beautiful !

Aloud.]

As large as is

The welcome of our hearts, which knows no bounds,
So would our King and we, that you should find
Our fortunes and our favors. Our Liege,
To Henry's embassy's complaint of violation
Of the Treaty of Montmerail, replied,

“Go, tell your King, that if he holds unto the customs

Of his grandsire, I well may hold to right
Hereditary, of succoring the exiled of all climes."

A'BECKET.

Indeed! indeed! 'Twas nobly said. Were I to live
Twice man's allotted time, I should not have
E'en hours enough wherein to thank his gracious Majesty
For such unbounded kindness shown me.

The knights and ladies retire to the back of the stage and

FITZURSE enters.

A'BECKET.

What! thou, my Lord Fitzurse?

Aside.] I love this youth!

And yet, alas! why so? His mother!

No! no! 'tis past, 'tis past.

Aloud.] Welcome, my son.

FITZURSE, *kneeling*.

How fare you; reverend Father?

Thy niece and cousin, all well, when so much evil
Is abroad?

A'BECKET.

All well, my son—and you? Oh! thine
Is, indeed, true love!

FITZURSE, *aside*.

Ha! knows he that? Oh, would it were!

A'BECKET.

When in my power, you refused high rank,
Thus, in my poverty, to join my train.

FITZURSE.

I wanted but thy love. Thy offices,
Many, more able, needed. I but made room
For one of the hungry crowd, that he might gorge
Himself with power, that dish which all who eat,

Lest they are favor'd with its choicest parts,
Soon sickened, fall its prey.

Henry on wrong heaps wrong :
Four hundred of thy truest friends are banished
From his realm, and Peter pence is stopped.

A'BECKET.

May Heaven pardon him as I do now !
How greatness brings sad havoc in its fall
On all who prop it up.

FITZURSE.

Not this alone ;
He hath sequestered the revenues of Canterbury,
And even thy domestics banished.

A'BECKET.

Revenged himself upon the innocent !
Oh, grimed heart ! More fiendish than was Nero
In his rage ! To think that he I've served so long,
From tender youth to age, should thus repay me.
Oh, wretched man and yet more wretched King !
My servants, say'st thou ? In what have they wronged him,
Save in the service they have rendered me ?
But he rewards the faithful with ingratitude.
I will to England hasten, and surrender up
My life ('tis all I've left) to him.

FITZURSE.

Nay, nay, my Lord !
That were both rash and vain.

A'BECKET.

My friends ! my friends !
Think, think of them ! Are they to suffer
For wrongs done by me ? Justice hath fled his realm,
And devils rule his heart. Had I remained
In England, this had not been.

Oh, curse of greatness!

But thus the branches die, when falls the oak!
Had I the voice of Rome, I'd shake the realm
Until it tottered on the verge of ruin,
And his proud sceptred head lay in my courser's way.
Peace, peace, my heart, but grow not instant old
With this assault of Fortune! Bear up, bear all;
Still hast thou manhood's vigor, with the wisdom
Born of sixty wintry years.

Attend me here, my son.

You who have flown to aid when fortune frowns,
Shall be the first on whom her favor'll light.
You'll find some friends in yonder room.
Farewell, and when you're weary of life's trifles,
Come to my closet; there you'll find its cares,
Spread with no niggard hand.

FITZURSE.

Bear up, my Lord, bear up; this unto Henry
Were the happiest hour he ever yet hath lived,
Could he but see your grief.

A'BECKET.

My grief! grief and A'Becket
Are as far apart, as are the sun
And his antipodes!

This is not grief
But rage, cooled in the air of practised self-control.
Oh, could you look into my heart's curtained chambers,
You would witness scenes would daunt your very soul!
A citadel stormed outwardly by foes,
The hosts within, maddened by suffering,
Turned upon themselves.

FITZURSE.

Oh, Father! give not way.

A'BECKET.

Give not way! I know my part; forbearance
For a season wins control; when once I hold
The reins, Henry of England, beware my rule;
The jewelled sceptre shall be all thou'lt wear
Of royalty; that will I leave you, that my revenge
May the more bitter be, reminding you, poor King,
Of what you once had been, and might yet be.

FITZURSE, *aside*.

This to the King, you'd never hold those reins.

A'BECKET.

I, I had rather be your crawling slave,
Toil at the galleys from the first breath of morn
Till day hath sunk to slumbers, than live but king
In name, held in such light esteem, the very air
Would refuse to bear my words beyond the walls
That heard them. Down Fate's long vista I have looked
And seen what I have spoken.

Mark me, my boy:

My mother gave me this.

She was the daughter

Of a Saracenic chief. My father
Warred with hers. After a conflict fierce,
Overcome by him and prisoner taken,
Long lay he ill, tended but by my mother,
Then a maid of beauty, spotless as her virtue.
Ministering to all his wants, foreseen
Long ere conceived—she learnt to love him,
And he loved her—for what will sooner melt
The heart of man than beauty, kneeling by the couch
Where pain has laid his stricken frame.
After some months, the tears that nursed those hours
Of grief, were changed to smiles should gladden

All life's days; and theirs were in their spring.
One great and brave, the other fond and fair.
Ransomed, he asked her hand; her father frowned;
But 'twas in vain—their troth was plighted.
They swore to wed. He left for England.
Scarce had he reached her shores, when at his feet
Knelt a fair youth, "London" and "Gilbert" on his
tongue

('Twas all the English that he knew), admittance
Craving to his service. Knowing 'twas her,
His heart alone adored, for love is ne'er deceived
However disguised the form—he raised her—
Clasped her to his breast—she was his own.

* * * * *

Within a little chapel by the sea-shore stands,
Mantled in ivy, veiled by rarest flowers
From the world's gaze profane, they gave their hands—
No hearts had they to give. Blest in each other,
Long in love they lived; and when he died,
The blow which felled the oak struck to the dust
The flower. There, by sweet Avon's side, where stands
A weeping willow, lie interred all
That was left to earth—their spirits dwell in Heaven.

Oh ye who watched my infancy,
Upon my age look down in love: mail me
In virtue, that the shafts of vice may pass
Me blunt and harmless. Grant that my arm may wield
Her truncheon, while her banner floats high o'er
My victorious brow.

But I detain you, Sir.
Go to my anteroom—there may my niece
And cousin both be found.

I will with you. [Exeunt.

SCENE THIRD.

An Anteroom in Palace.

MATILDE, LUCILLE; KNIGHTS OF FRANCE *and* FLANDERS
advancing.

FRANCE.

Ladies fair, we trust that us and ours you use
As best promotes your pleasures. Many's the charm
Of France—all yours, if you'll but ask it.

MATILDE.

Thanks, heartfelt thanks, most noble Lords; so rich,
So bounteous is your clime, that, were I not
Of England, I fain would be of France.
The very air of heaven is generous here;
The flowers, the fruits, so lavish all their sweets,
Ambrosial is each breath.

FRANCE.

Nay, nay, unworthy she of praise
So sweet; believe me, 'tis that she borrows
From thy charms, that all's so passing fair.

MATILDE.

The rose could scarce desert us here in France,
So finished are you in your speech, my Lord.

FRANCE.

In the moon's ray alone, the dew-drop glistens
Longest. May we for many a day boast
The bright light thy sweet smiles give our land.
Who may this be approaches? A gallant gentleman!

MATILDE.

A noble Lord, the pride of all who know him.

FITZURSE *enters.*

FITZURSE.

To MATILDE.] Fair lady, by your leave.

[*Kisses her hand.*

Your servant, gentlemen.

MATILDE.

My Lord Fitzurse, you're welcome.

Presenting LUCILLE.] My lovely cousin!

FITZURSE *to her.*

My Morning Star!

[*Kisses her hand.*

Oh, what a golden day

Herein is promised me!

LUCILLE.

Fitzurse, my noble Lord!

The others retire.]

[*They walk apart.*

FITZURSE.

My fair Lucille—Sun of my life, what, what
Hath ravaged my rich garden thus—its flowers
All faded—all its pure springs dried up—where
Are the roses rich, bloomed richest on thy cheek?
The lilies fair which made thy neck their bed?
Their breath alone remains. And those bright orbs
Which once did put the stars to shame, now seem
But wells of grief. Cheer up, cheer up, sweet friend;
Call from thy soul the light once wont to glisten
In thy tearless eye. You'll make me sad, dear girl,
In faith you will. Ah! now you smile, and now I know
My own Lucille. What is't hath changed you thus?

LUCILLE.

Thy absence, my dear Lord, and loving doubts
Lest we no more should meet. Ah! that alone
Were grief enough to make stones weep; but as the sun
Their sweet distillments draws from flowery meads,

So shall thy presence from my verdant heart
Reap harvest of such joys, thy eye will love
To linger on the scene, on which it once so fondly gazed.

FITZURSE.

True, Love, though banished from our cherished home,
We'll deck in joy our thoughts—and smiles the garb
Shall be, the face shall wear—all lands the same to love.

LUCILLE.

In truth we will, dear Lord—but pray, how came you here?

FITZURSE.

My heart had learnt to beat most healthful time
To the soft music of Lucille's sweet voice.
That missed—all others sounded "harsh and out of tune."
So I came here to France.

LUCILLE.

Then Henry hath not frowned
On you—no, no, that could not be.

FITZURSE.

Nor is;
But I have frowned on him—spurned the base rule
That tramples thus on worth; genius to slander's shafts
Hath fallen prey, and wisdom fled his realm.
The ides of March brought not more ills upon the sons
Of Rome, than this on England hath.

LUCILLE.

Oh, say not so, for she our country is—
But see, these knights of Flanders and of France
Have ta'en their leave—they are most courtly lords;
To them I'm much beholden.

FITZURSE.

Thence, much am I;
Come, dearest love, and we'll amid this castle's varied
scenes,
While away a few short hours.

[*Exeunt.*

SCENE FOURTH.

Court at Sens—A Grand Hall.

Enter HENRY and DE BROC.

HENRY.

I have advices tell me the Primate threatens me.
Hè threaten me! Why, what a slave am I!
A monkish cowl more terror strikes into my heart
Than twice ten thousand men, all mailed in steel!
Still, should he issue interdict, farewell
To all my power—this will suspend all forms
Religious—marriage, baptism, burial—No priest
Can then officiate in public or in private.
'Twill break the bonds of loyalty. I'll stay his course.
De Broc! my Lord De Broc! Give instant orders
That all England's ports be watched, with this command,
That any one, or man or child, matron or maid,
Who shall bear over, promulgate, or obey,
Letters of Interdict, receiveth instant death,—
No clergy's benefit allowed. Announce
That if the Cistercian Order, now at Pontigny,
Continue to protect this traitor, their Order
Be expelled from my domains. [*Exit DE BROC.*

Enter FITZURSE.] Ha! my Fitzurse!FITZURSE, *kneeling*.

My Liege.

HENRY, *sarcastically*.

How fares our loving Primate?

FITZURSE.

Well, my Liege—France, Flanders, and the Pope outvie
each other
In favors shown him.

HENRY.

Is't so, in fact?

FITZURSE.

In fact, my Liege.

HENRY.

What can we do?

FITZURSE.

Make peace with him.

HENRY.

Make peace, but how? Must I cringe to him?

FITZURSE.

No, my Liege, use France. He will a mediator be.
There must be peace, else your whole realm's disjoined.
Better 'twere made in a friendly way, than you be forced
To it.

HENRY.

True, true; we will consult with France
As to the better mode. A'Becket knows not
You are in my service?

FITZURSE.

No, deems me fallen from favor.

HENRY.

Let it be so, but heed him well. Attend me! [*Exeunt.*

SCENE FIFTH.

"Gothic."

A'BECKET *and* BLOIS.

BLOIS.

Your orders are fulfilled, my Lord—
Yet may not Henry injure you still more?

A'BECKET. .

He injure me? Each wrong he does me falls
As sand, a handful thrown aloft, covering whole acres
With its particles. Such my revenge shall be—
A myriad ills for every wrong he does my country
And my friends.

At Sens, henceforth, I'll dwell in peace,
Out of the range of his hostility,
While he'll live troubled with the fear of me.
His Holiness hath bidden me, "in this my poverty,"
To be "Consoler of the poor." To Henry, begging,
He refused a conference, and me appoints
His Legate unto England. Most generous act!
Said I not that all worked well? Trust, trust to years;
We better read the hearts of men than ye
Of tender youth.

BLOIS.

'Tis true, my Lord.

A'BECKET.

One Alexander, and but one, was to the old world known;
So shall Rome's sacred 'scutcheon his name bear,
Greatest of all her Pontiffs. Such men are offspring
Of a thousand years—none, none like him
Shall the next ten centuries see. Ah! here
Albert comes. More news? Methinks this day
Is big with it.

Enter ALBERT.][A'BECKET, *taking letter, reads.*

What is this? What is this?

Henry inhibits all appeals, or unto the Pope
Or me; declares it treason to introduce
Our interdicts into his kingdom, and obliges all
Who in England dwell, to swear observance
Of these orders, on pain of most dread sufferings.
This, this is monstrous; it were as well that water

Were forbidden! I'll fill the world with it!
This is the cause of God! Go you, and unto Louis
Write this, also to Philip of Flanders:
"That I suspend the spiritual thunder
Over Henry's head, to fall, less timely repentance comes."
This will him deprive of all his continental territories,
And endanger his power in England.
Write this, and messengers dispatch to Rome
With news of what I do.

I'll be myself once more.

I'll nothing with this King! He yet shall sue
To me! All mediations shall but faster forge
The bars keep Henry from my love.

Enter JOHN OF SALISBURY.

Ha! my friend.

Of Salisbury, what news hast thou?

JOHN OF SALISBURY.

John of Oxford

Hath for himself obtained absolution,
And resigned his Deanery to the Pope,
But, by his appointment, straightway received it back.

A'BECKET.

Indeed! This looks not well for us! What arts
Were used to influence His Holiness?
What more?

SALISBURY.

A Bull from the Pope, my Lord, the decree
Annulling, did confiscate your goods,
But with his prohibition 'gainst excommunicating
Any person in England, or interdicting that realm.
While he his wish doth indicate, exhorting you
To moderation and humility.

A'BECKET.

To moderation

And humility? I'll see my friend of France—
Louis will ne'er desert me.

Whence comes this change?

To moderation and humility!

And what is this but moderation

And humility? These cloistered courts

After my princely halls, and but two friends

For all my regal train—

I would for myself be humble, very humble,

Humble as the dust.

My exaltation were my sure reward,

But my poor friends—my country!

END OF ACT II.

ACT III.

SCENE FIRST.

"Stone"—A'Becket's apartment in Monastery at St. Colomba.

Enter LORDS DE BROC and DE TRACY.

DE TRACY.

Is this the love France bears to England,
Such princely entertainment to her foes?

DE BROC.

'Twas ever thus, his seeming modesty
Was but the semblance of austerity.

A beggar's robe upon a princely couch
Proved well this upstart's vanity.

DE TRACY.

Peace, peace! He comes——

DE BROC.

Well! let him, 'tis but to blind
The vulgar he's thus clothed, they never see
Aught but the ante-room, and that's the same,
A picture of sad poverty. He knoweth well
How best to catch the vulgar crowd. My Lord,
There's danger here to us and to our rights!

DE TRACY.

Once on the shore of England, 'twill go hard
But we shall tame his spirit; escape
Were not so easy, had we guarded well.

DE BROC.

We'll have no peace while Becket lives to plot.

DE TRACY.

True, true! There's something in the air of France!
How proud grows Lord Fitzurse!

DE BROC.

Fair and false! false and fair!
He counts upon A'Becket's niece's wide domains.
I sent some flowers to his lady love,
Of fragrance rich and rare, with lines composed
By our most sweet queen, in the envelope
Came from Lord Fitzurse—(she knew the hand,
For he's a dainty scholar) together—
With his last words to us,—

Sarcastically.] His friends should advance his suit.
Lo! here the Archbishop comes.

Enter A'BECKET.

DE BROC.

Our gracious Lord Archbishop!

A'BECKET, *aside*.

Our Lord Archbishop!—no thanks to you I'm so.

Aloud.]

What would ye, Sirs, with me?

DE BROC.

A friendly conference.

A'BECKET.

I'll send my kinsman to you, Sirs: I hold
No private conference—there's a wide gulf
Between the Saxon Primate and the Norman lords.

DE TRACY.

You do mistake us much, my Lord. We come as friends.

A'BECKET.

So came the serpent, who beguiled poor Eve,
Promising knowledge, which but proved her ruin.

DE BROC.

Not so, my Lord. Peruse this letter, 'tis from England's
King.

Aside to DE TRACY.]

Mark him, my friend!

A'BECKET *reads—then says—*

Indeed, 'tis well—'tis well.

Accept my welcome, most noble Lords,
And pardon an old man's petulance,
In that I did receive you, formally—
Sit ye, and we'll discuss this business.
Ho! Albert.

[*Enter ALBERT.*

Bid them prepare repasts for fifty knights,—
Friends have arrived from France. [*Exit ALBERT.*

How does his gracious majesty?

DE TRACY.

Well in all things save one—he bade us say,
And that, the loss of your society.
With this, that with the past its ills were flown,
Therefore, in oblivion buried, let all
Vexed questions be, and begs your quick return.

A'BECKET.

Bury the past, my Lords!
Do we forget the avalanche has hurled
Our stately mansions to the dust, and cast
Unto the winds our prosperous fortunes?
Henry asks much—besides, here have I
Plenty, honor, ease; while I in England,
At best, should find but lack of love, dishonor,
Penury.—No, no, my Lords; not to use
Harsher phrase, this is ungenerous!

DE BROC.

Nay, nay, my Lord; you and your friends shall be restored
To all your livings; and all the benefices
That have been filled during your absence
Shall be vacated, until supplied by you.
He asks but this, that you absolve his ministers.

A'BECKET.

We will confer on this. Albert, attend these lords.
You must be quite o'erworn with your ride.
I thank you for your love, shown in your haste
To greet me. Doves had scarce flown faster.

DE TRACY.

Our service to you, Father. [*Exeunt.*]

A'BECKET.

Falsehood here, falsehood everywhere, methinks
The very air is filled with it. I scent naught else.
Return to England and he'll repair the past!

Restore myself and friends our proud estates—
Can he restore the time of which he has robbed me?
Why, what a fool he thinks me! Will do all this—
All this, ay more, so say these lords. Catch me
With promises, and birds with lime, when on them
Ye can lay it, Sirs! There's something more in this;
Insult to injury. I'll none of it. When I may land
On England's shore, backed by my thousands,
Then I may return, but never on the strength
Of Henry's promise—which, like the Upas,
Wins the gazer's eye, but to the trusting touch
Is poisonous.

And more: there are my private heart-seated wrongs
Which stalk around me, though there's lapse of years.
'Twas he who robbed me of my youth's fond hopes,
Dishonoring her who was my only pride!
No, no, not so; I will be just even in my hate:
Hers was the sin to me—not his—he knew not of my
love.

Oh! I forget—my heart and head grow old—
I forgave him then, and took England for my bride.
Away. ye selfish thoughts! Ye must be strangers
To the breast of greatness.

Enter MATILDE and SALISBURY.

A'BECKET.

My child, here is news from England.
Henry craves our return. [*Aside.*] I'll sound her
woman's wit.

MATILDE.

You will not go, dear father.

SALISBURY.

Most surely not.

A'BECKET.

He promises to restore myself and friends
Unto our former honors.

SALISBURY.

His promises, my Lord—

A'BECKET.

Are—

SALISBURY.

But sportsmen's calls to lure their prey.

MATILDE.

You will not go?

A'BECKET.

Should I be afraid, my child?

A'Becket ne'er knew fear, for he is mailed
In the garb of faith!

SALISBURY.

Father, it is not that you fear, but you mistrust;
You know he is treacherous, as hyena fierce,
And you'd not venture in his den.
Prudence is a manly virtue!

Go not, my Lord.

Here are your truest friends, consult with them.

Enter FITZURSE on one side, LUCILLE on the other.

A'BECKET.

Lucille, my child! my Lord Fitzurse—ye whom
I much do love—ye whom I call mine own,
Give me your voices. England here writes
(Her lords have just arrived), and begs
Our quick return, promising to all our friends
Their former state.

LUCILLE.

Father, you'll not return!

Aside.] Why came Lord Fitzurse here?

A'BECKET.

Do you counsel thus?

LUCILLE, *kneeling to him.*

Upon my bended knee, I do beseech you, Sir,
That letter!

[A'BECKET gives it her.

Aside.] The same hand as that to Henry's embassy.
Love cannot blind me to the fact, 'tis his,—
Fitzurse's!—Bear up, my heart! I'll note him well.

A'BECKET.

And what, Fitzurse, say you?

SALISBURY.

I, would not trust his promise.

FITZURSE.

I, would, my Lord;
Honor and safety unto all he vouches.

LUCILLE to FITZURSE.

Would you, my Lord?

FITZURSE.

I would, fair lady.

LUCILLE.

His promise!

Oh! Father, do not go, save hostages
Be left with France for your security.

A'BECKET.

Well thought, my child!

SALISBURY.

And deeds, confirming all your rights,
Be sent.

A'BECKET.

So be it. Salisbury, meet me at hour of nine;
Lest Henry trifles, we'll safe bind at once.
Each now, to their several pleasures.

Exeunt all, except FITZURSE and LUCILLE.

FITZURSE.

Sweet flower of Spring, all will be well !
I heard from Henry by this embassy :
There is full power to comply with what
A'Becket asks.

LUCILLE.

My Lord, you, from King Henry, advices have !
Why spake you as you did, when others raised their
doubts ?

FITZURSE.

I gave my answer unto all they asked.

LUCILLE.

My Lord ! My Lord ! You gave your answer !
A friend had opened to his friend his heart ;
So he his thoughts had read. A follower
Should have done so. I would not trust this King,
Nor—

FITZURSE.

Nor what ?

LUCILLE.

No matter—

FITZURSE.

Dost thou reprove ?

LUCILLE.

You heard from Henry !
How could you hold communion with A'Becket's foe ?

FITZURSE *aside*.

Am I love's slave, that I am questioned thus ?

Aloud.]

Dost thou reprove, fair maid ?

LUCILLE.

As does your heart,
Does mine ; but oh, what grief, if that it must do so.

Aside.] To love, to doubt ! Oh, wretched fate is mine !

FITZURSE.

For me, Lucille, these words?

LUCILLE.

For you, my Lord;

Or any man, whose smiling face

Is but the glittering sheath, covers a heart

Would stab its dearest friend. [FITZURSE starts.

You met these lords in private

Ere they had seen mine uncle; a secret conference

Held with them; these facts concealed, when in good faith

Consulted. [FITZURSE offers to take her hand.

Nay, Sir, your hand's unclean, fresh from the traitor's act.

FITZURSE.

Lucille!

LUCILLE.

Who would be false to him, is false to me!

FITZURSE.

Why this? How know you that I conference held?

LUCILLE.

Your silence to my charge when made!

Aside.]

I will not wound him, with these dreadful lines—

His letter to the King—assassins of my young heart's
hopes.

I've said enough, unless his heart is stone.

FITZURSE.

'Twas in your uncle's cause, and thine; besides,

I saw them but a moment.

LUCILLE.

Would'st thou prevaricate and gloss it o'er to me,

My Lord?—you met them, Sir, my uncle's foes,

In private, 'tis enough—false unto him,

You'd be unfair to me. "Candor" is the motto

Blazoned on true love's shield! Farewell!
I am much grieved to find you lack this virtue.
Who would have thought you thus could mar
The noblest gifts of nature?

Farewell, farewell!

My love is changed to pity. Leave me, Sir!

FITZURSE.

Lady, you will repent you of this hour.

Farewell! [*Going.*

LUCILLE.

My Lord, I do repent me of this hour,
And many hours past! May Heaven pardon you,
As I do now!

FITZURSE.

Farewell, fair Lady, since it must be so.
You will relent.

LUCILLE.

Never! never!

FITZURSE.

Farewell! [*Exits.*

LUCILLE.

Are there in store for me more bolts like this?
If so, would Heaven they'd fall at once
And crush me.

A'BECKET *enters.*

My child, what moves you thus?
Where is Fitzurse?

LUCILLE.

Fitzurse! Fitzurse! He's false to you, to me,
To the whole world; for all who knew him
Held him as candor's child. Trust him not,
Father, trust him not! [*Giving a letter.*
Thy letter and these lines,
'Twas the same hand penned both.

A'BECKET *reads*.

Ha—

“A'Becket's friend, who fair Lucille doth woo,
Is Henry's friend, A'Becket's direst foe.
Her bridal rites will prove A'Becket's grave,
When fair Lucille becomes, Lord Fitzurse's slave.”
Where found you this? [*Aside.*] 'Tis from Queen Eleanor!

LUCILLE, *taking flowers from her bosom.*

These flowers bore the thorn.

I cannot nurse you longer. [*Drops them gently.*]

A'BECKET.

Poison oft lurks beneath earth's fairest fruits!
What more knowest thou?

LUCILLE.

He saw these lords this morn;
Held private conference, ere you met them, Sir.

A'BECKET.

Indeed, was't so? nor spake when I did question him?
How false! How foul! Cheer thee, my child, all sorrows
Have their balm! Go, seek Matilde, I'll summon
Salisbury. [*Exit LUCILLE.*]

I cannot believe, without the weightiest proofs,
That he is false to me.

Yet it is his heritage.

Him whom I guarded, though unbeknown,
From tenderest infancy to full-grown pride.
I saw the germs of greatness in the boy,
And trusted they would bloom in manhood.
Thus ever fail our fondest hopes.

My poor, poor child!

Why falls this blow on her? Her, whom I thought
Secure as cloistered nun from love-born griefs.

SALISBURY *enters unseen by A'BECKET.*

How vain is man's heedfulness! Poor girl! poor girl!
But thus it is with all—how fitful is life!
To-day, in manly pride, as dares the bark
The ocean's changefulness, the gallant youth struts,
Conscious of his power; but soon, as sinks
Beneath that ocean's frowns the groaning hulk,
His crest is lowered by the storm which strikes,
Sooner or later, all who hope to soar
High o'er the world's wild waves.

Youth is hope's season,
Though the seed that's sown, oft yields but sorry harvest.
Life is a dream, naught real but the hour.
Unstable as the stream, earth's offerings,
The sweetest to the taste are joys un hoped.
The bitterest sorrow comes when unforeseen.
Hard seems life's yoke, yet easy 'tis to bear,
If mated, but with faith.

SALISBURY.

How wonderfully wise! He's wrapt in thought
On man's futility. I must disturb his musing.
Father!

A'BECKET.

My son, what news?

SALISBURY.

Your terms made known to Henry's embassy,
They, having well feasted, would not o'erwait
The night, but posted back again. Methinks,
My Lord, he'll grant you any thing, so urgent
Were their words.

A'BECKET.

'Tis well; but hast thou heard
What passed between the King of France

And he who is miscalled England's?
Thus says a later embassy, just arrived.

SALISBURY.

A later embassy!

A'BECKET.

E'en so. Hear thou their words—
Attended by his friends and counsellors,
His sovereignty proudly worn, Henry approached
Unbending; his salutation formal,
And his words as cold as winds that come
From Norseland. 'Twas not the part of France
His breath should be the breeze from balmy Southland
blows.

But as exposed, most hostile things produce
A genial spark—even from the meeting
Of their distant spirits, a flame of love
Sprang forth. Right royally forgetting and forgiving,
He to those honors of which I was so unjustly reft,
With many more, restored me.

We will to England soon,
When unto you, high office I'll intrust.

SALISBURY.

Bright ray of Peace! May Heaven be thanked!

A'BECKET.

E'en so—and by its mercies we are called.
In action to proclaim unto the world
Our gratefulness. Much is there to be done;
The lawless nobles must be curbed, licentious
Is the very air of England. Gold, glittering gold,
And an unseemly pride, are all these nobles
Glory in. Their vassals are oppressed,
And the High Church neglected.

It must, shall, be reformed.

This for thine ear alone.

[*Enter* LUCILLE.

What would you, child?

LUCILLE.

The King, our Liege, arrived to-day in France
This letter bearing, his lords an audience crave.

Gives a letter.]

Fearing treachery lurked beneath, I bore it
Here myself. What says his Majesty?

A'BECKET, *after reading.*

We are recalled to all our honors!
The King reposes now some few miles hence,
His lords of high degree attend me here.
Salisbury, go you and sound them well,
Note all their actions, even their garb observe.
The leopard's skin is most in vogue
With our nobility, and 'neath its beauties
Oft a poniard gleams. I fear not, but mistrust.
Their purpose known to you, you'll find me here.

[*Exit* SALISBURY.

Lucille, my child, pray lay aside this grief,
Thou mayst have heavier trials yet in store.

LUCILLE.

If so, I'll bear them—as I will bear this—
Am I not A'Becket's niece? his child?

A'BECKET.

Well said, my idol girl—
Yet stay—thy beauties now full blown, many there are
In England who will strive to pluck the flower
From the parent stem—and at thy age the heart
Beats not alone with throbbings born within,
But, like the sweet airs heard in verdant vales,
Whispers in melodies in ten thousand born.

LUCILLE.

I've done with love—an o'ermastered argosie—
I've sunk my young heart's countless wealth
In the deep bosom of forgetfulness—
Mine uncle dear, hast thou not watched
O'er infancy's frail flowers, smiled on their budding,
And what you are pleased to call their full-blown
Beauties, tended, with parent carefulness?

A'BECKET.

A father's love, no more.

LUCILLE.

Yes, more; a mother's!
Were you not both to me?

A'BECKET.

And thou to me, a child.

The purest, dearest moments granted me
In a long life, I owe to thee, Lucille.
I never knew a parent's love. Though I am risen
To greatness, 'twas heart-born grief marshalled me
To honor; since then I have never halted
In my rapid course; no matter how opposed,
All things I made, rungs in ambition's ladder;
In my whole course of life o'erleaping
Where I could not level to my will, and once,
But once, have fallen—and that was, as the flame
On sudden dies, to shine with greater brightness.
We will prepare for England. [LUCILLE retires.

Enter SALISBURY

What say these lords?

SALISBURY.

All that, to the ear, is fair.

A'BECKET.

But to the thought
Most foul—I read your meaning—speak, my friend.

SALISBURY.

With every wish for your success—much joy
That you to England will return—smiles, words
Such as are used by courtiers, they lauded
Henry to the skies, for what he did perforce.
Making him centre unto them, his satellites,
No more, no more!

A'BECKET.

So greatness ever is attended.
Upon the lion's heels thus treads the jackall,
And what he leaves, delights to feed on.
You met them graciously! Salisbury,
If they can, they will sting—we must draw their fangs.
Wait they below?

SALISBURY.

They do, my Lord.

A'BECKET.

We will receive them here.

• *Exit SALISBURY and enter ALBERT.*

Albert, I may have work for you, await without;
Your arms are ready? Cordin and Bassett
With you? I'll knock, should you be needed.

*Enter SALISBURY, DE TRACY, DE MOREVILLE, and SIR
RICHARD BRITO.*

A'BECKET.

Welcome, Gentlemen!

DE TRACY.

To the Archbishop of Canterbury
Our service—welcome to the Primacy once more!

A'BECKET.

Thanks, Gentlemen; thanks!

DE MOREVILLE.

The King commends himself to you;
He would that you, with your fair nieces both,
Should grace his court to-night, for soon he goes
To Normandy.

A'BECKET.

Say to my Liege we will attend
His pleasure. This hour heralds days of joy
To come, rich in the service we may render him;
And believe me, Gentlemen, that handmaids meet
My children fair will be.

BRITO.

Well know we that, my Lord, for hearts, ne'er owned
The power of love before, unto their beauty
Bend the suppliant knee.

A'BECKET.

To maiden influence
Noble hearts e'er yield a grateful homage;
Their beauty shows not only to the eye.

BRITO.

So have we learnt, and happy shall we be
When we may welcome them to English homes;
We will await you in King Henry's palace.

A'BECKET.

Thanks, my Lord, thanks to all! Peace be with you.
Farewell! [*Exeunt.*

So much for their nobility!
Didst note, my Salisbury, how constrained their words,
Their actions forced, uneasy—guilty souls
They bear about with them—trust them?

You know me better—

Besides, I have old claims on them—a wrong
A'Becket will forgive, but not forget.

SALISBURY.

Such wrongs you never can : use them, but watch them.

A'BECKET.

We will : prepare a fitting escort to the Court
To-night—to-morrow we'll to England.
But what should faith professed, prove false ?
Louis bade me not trust, save that the kiss
Of peace were given—this he will refuse—
Bear this forthwith unto the Bishops of London
And Salisbury, and to the world make known
My sentence of excommunication against them.
Now will I fix upon foundation firm
As that whereon Albion's white cliffs are based
My Empire and my honors. England's glory
And the Church's power—her people's welfare
And her nobles' pride—shall be A'Becket's care.

END OF ACT III.

ACT IV.

SCENE FIRST.

A large Hall in De Tracy's Castle, England.

Enter FITZURSE.

FITZURSE.

New wonder on new wonder—

A'Becket

And the King at peace! No thanks to me for this.

The churlish priest ere now had been but dust,

Had Henry ta'en my counsel.

DE TRACY *enters.*

De Tracy,

Hast heard the news? They say, last night, strange things

Were seen—water was cast upon a burning pile

And brighter made the flames; with the furred cat

The house-infesting vermin couched;

And the watchful guardian of my house fawned

On the thief assailed it!

DE TRACY.

'Tis strange, indeed!

FITZURSE.

Yet stranger still is what hath happ'd to-day.

DE TRACY.

How so?

FITZURSE.

A'Becket and the King are palm in palm.

DE TRACY.

Bright omen, Fitz., for you!

FITZURSE.

Indeed!

DE TRACY.

May not his fair niece partake the nature of the times?

FITZURSE.

The sun which gladdens nature's face, ne'er changes
His fixed course. The moon, which softly smiles
Upon a darkened world, may gild, not chase, the gloom.
No change e'er comes o'er these which most delight
The world's sad wayfarer. How may the fair Lucille,
Then, turn aside and smile where she hath frowned?
No, no, De Tracy! [*Aside.*] He shall not read my heart.

DE TRACY.

In charity.

FITZURSE.

In charity! Should Fitzurse prize the hand
Without the heart? The sun is golden,
But without its heat, what would its radiance be?
'Twould catch the eye, but on the senses pall.
De Tracy, I have lived in court and camp;
Wealth, honor, want, despite, have been my lot;
With all there was a void—a lack of something
Which I knew not of. When griefs afflicted
And when joys assailed, alike 'twas felt,
My friend—a loneliness. I knew not whence
It came, till fair Lucille I saw.

DE TRACY.

Why then

Too proud to take the hand?

FITZURSE.

The hand without the heart!

DE TRACY.

When lovely woman so regards a man
That she'll to him intrust her lot and fortune,
Is it not worth more, when springing from esteem,
Than when it shoots to life, like the fair flower
That blooms at dawn, to close ere noonday comes?
The plant of slowest growth is longest lived,
Its shoots the farthest and is firmest fixed!

FITZURSE.

It may be so—but love without romance!

DE TRACY.

Have done with fancy! She's a fickle dame!
Her votaries decks in colors false and fleeting.
Your nature has too much of the bright clime
Wherein your youth was passed. The wave which
sparkles
May a poison bear, when raised unto the lip,
While sluggish waters will the fainting form
Awake to life and strength!

If fair Lucille but smiles!

FITZURSE.

Alas! how can she?

DE TRACY.

Deem that she prizes justly your true worth,
Now longer, better known.

Here are De Moreville

And Sir Richard Brito.

Enter DE MOREVILLE and SIR RICHARD BRITO.

Welcome, Gentlemen! My Lord Fitzurse,
Sir Richard Brito and De Moreville here
Have ever found a home. We once were a merry crew;

Let's be as merry as the times permit.

Ho! boy, there!—wine. [*To FITZURSE.*] Come, Sir, be one of us.

FITZURSE.

With all my heart! Here's to you, Gentlemen!
Why, 'tis as good as is your speech, De Tracy—
A free and generous wine.

DE TRACY.

Thanks, noble friend!

Here's unto all, long life and happiness!
Why hangs, Fitzurse, this cloud upon your face?
Your manly spirit should o'erlook the ills
Of life, and smile at frowning fortune.
Clear, clear thy brow, and let it shine as does
The mountain's top, high o'er the thunder-storm.

FITZURSE.

It shall. Yet gives not the mist enshrouds the mount
From view, a richer beauty to it, when 'tis seen?

DE TRACY.

Ay, truly! But a truce to jesting; what ill
Afflicts you?

FITZURSE *to* DE MOREVILLE.

Thou hast heard the news? A'Becket
And the King at peace!

DE MOREVILLE.

At peace! Is't from that quarter
That this storm-cloud comes? Strange! strange, indeed!
A'Becket has a niece, my Lord. [*FITZURSE, impatient.*
To DE TRACY.] You've seen the fair Lucille?

DE TRACY.

When but a child.

DE MOREVILLE.

The loveliest flower boasts not the richest bud.

FITZURSE.

Most true! Yet, is not Lucille beautiful?

Aside.]

I hoped, A'Becket outworn with grief,
Lucille, our Liege's ward, I might have won her.
Her wealth would prop my falling fortunes,
Though her disprize should chill my heart.

DE MOREVILLE.

The fairest maid e'er seen! Fair Venus' prototype!
You loved her once?

FITZURSE.

And if I'd live must win her.

Will not A'Becket strive so to please our King,
As in his favor henceforth e'er to live?
Henry's command might find a willing ear,
Were the past brought to mind.

BRITO.

Wouldst thou threaten the great A'Becket?
You know him not, my Lord. His surplice clothes
As stout a heart as ever armor cased.
Shrinks the firm-based rock from wave
That may overwhelm it? Who'd dare so much
As name the word, to threat? His glance
Would fall on him like Heaven's thunderbolt;
His stately mien, awe-filling, strike him mute!
I am a soldier, one who has borne arms
From youth to age, and yet would brave the serried ranks
Rather than face that tongue's keen irony.
Oh! be advised by me.

DE MOREVILLE.

Sir Richard well doth speak.

King Henry's favorite and A'Becket's friend,
Your suit were easily gained, never as his foe.

Render the Primate favors—he'll not frown ;
And then, in gratitude, his niece's thoughts
Will turn to you ; her heart float down the silver stream
Of peace, and fancy bear it through its flowery brakes,
To the glittering source whence all her new joys spring.
De Tracy, thinkst not so ?

DE TRACY.

You counsel well, my Lord—
And yet, Fitzurse, the hand without the heart !

FITZURSE.

That matters not ! I'll wear her, if not win her !
The ray that woos the verdant mead, dispels
The mist enshrouds it from its heat.
So shall my heart's fond love the tear that dims
Lucille's bright eye, and 'neath its warmth new beauties
bring
To light. Now let's to Court, my Lords !

BRITO.

Wouldst wrest
The flower from the parent stem, where it would bloom
For many a day, to see it fade and fall
Within the hour ?

FITZURSE.

A'Becket rules this realm but as I rule her heart !

DE MOREVILLE.

Believe me, my Lord,
Its rich gem gone, the casket's not worth having !

FITZURSE.

Leave that to me, my arms shall be its setting.
I'm for the Court.

[*Exit.*

DE TRACY.

So I! So all!
There shall we see if he is Fortune's child—
I'll save this maid, unless she loves, from love so wild.
[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE SECOND.

Porch to the King's Ante-room.

HERALD.

The Lord Archbishop comes!

HENRY.

We will descend and greet him
As our brother. [*To FITZURSE.*] Note him, young
Lord!

A'BECKET *enters in great state, he and his suite mounted.*

Welcome, my Lord Archbishop, to my Court!

A'BECKET, *dismounting.*

My service to your Majesty.

HENRY.

We gavè this audience that, your wishes learnt,
Once more we might be friends—we have no need
Of words—what is your wish?

A'BECKET.

First, that, being your subject,
You free pardon grant for all that's past.

HENRY.

'Tis thine.

A'BECKET.

Then, as being England's Primate,
That you restore to me the Church of Canterbury,
All its possessions, and your royal favor,

With promise on my part of love and honor,
And whatsoever may be performed by an Archbishop
Unto his sovereign.

HENRY.

'Tis granted all—all's thine—
Herewith unto my favor I receive you
And your friends. Go, for a time, with me
To Normandy, where we may labor for our subjects' good.

A'BECKET.

Long absent from my friends and country, Sire,
'Twould please me, had I leave, straightway to sail
For England.

HENRY.

Your pleasure is mine, my Lord, to England
Let it be. My Court in Normandy is ever thine,
When it shall please your Holiness.

A'BECKET.

Thanks, my Liege; thanks!

HENRY.

"Would you but do as I desire, all things
Should be intrusted to your care."

A'BECKET.

It shall be so.

HENRY.

'Tis well! At Rouen you will find meet preparations made;
And her Archbishop your escort to England.
Now unto Court; where we in harmony,
Amid our assembled friends, will close the day.
Bring here our steeds. *[Exeunt attendants.]*

*The horses are brought; A'BECKET prepares to mount,
when the King holds his stirrup.*

A'BECKET.

Nay, pardon me, my Liege; this is not meet!

HENRY.

The monarch of the realm makes all things meet;
Mount, my Lord Primate!

A'BECKET.

Nay, nay, my Liege!

HENRY.

I will be King, even in my courtesies.

A'BECKET.

So be it. [*Kisses the King's hand and mounts.*]

HENRY.

On to the Court, my friends!

[*All mount and ride off.*]

SCENE THIRD.

The Court.

Lords and Gentlemen in waiting. Enter FITZURSE, DE TRACY, DE MOREVILLE, and SIR RICHARD BRITO.

FITZURSE.

Lo! where they come! How loving, palm in palm!

DE TRACY.

'Tis so! Stand back, my Lords! The King!

Enter KING HENRY, and A'BECKET, and attendants.

HENRY.

My Lords and Gentlemen, receive once more
My reverend counsellor and loving friend,
Thomas A'Becket, Primate of England,
Of Canterbury Archbishop, unto our favor,
And all those honors so justly his, herein restored.
Respect him, as you love me.

ALL.

Welcome to the Lord Primate!

A'BECKET.

Thanks unto all! Thanks unto your Majesty,
That you have so o'erstepped the bounds
Of kingly condescension, thus to the Court
Presenting me. [*Aside.*] Pour oil on ruffled waves,
For when the storm's just o'er, their swell is highest.
Aloud.]

Though time has changed the mortal part of him
Here unto you returned, the immortal soul
Has grown most strong in sacred learning;
Holding communion with those happier climes
Where virtue only reigns. That realm alone
Higher is than England's, and on the faults
And failings of mankind looks with more kindly eye.
My noble Lords, here see I those
I called my friends, and found my foes!
But, with my blessing on you all, accept
From me free pardon of the past.
Let the volume of your hate be sealed,
So far as aught's recorded against me;
Mine did I long since hurl far down the past's abyss.
Look to the motives which did move me once,
The means I used you'll find were just.

LORDS.

He would uphold the past! Treason to our King!

A'BECKET.

Peace awhile! Let not ill-tempered haste
Dash into atoms the frail cup of love I offer
To your lips. Here is no treason! I would that Church
and State
Were as twin brothers, linked in amity;

United, they shall stand till time's no more ;
Divided, they must fall ere set of sun.

Discontent among the Lords.]

My Liege, command that silence reign, else our good
purpose fails ;
And all that's done be but as words written
On the sea-shore's sands.

HENRY.

Peace, my Lords, peace ! Who speaks,
His King offends.

My Lord High Primate asks
Attentive ears.

A'BECKET.

In our honored King, my Lords, the father
Of this great realm, you see the pride, the power
Of England—in me, the instrument of Heaven ;
An humble agent of its blessed will.
What were our King disrobed, dethroned ?
What were the priest, stripped of his sacred office ?
Foes are there who'd delight in Henry's fall !
Foes are there who do long for my dishonor !
The heart must entertain and harbor vice,
Ere the seducer's voice can steal
Into its curtained chambers, and rob it of its jewel.
Remember this ; be true unto yourselves,
Your King, your country. You'll find Truth's legions
Are your best resource. All are but men—yet he
Who worthiest bears his charge, adds honor to his
honors.
Your ear, my King.

DE MOREVILLE, *aside*.

How bold a tongue he has !

BRITO.

Said I not so ?

DE TRACY.

And yet, how gilded is his speech ;
It falls upon the ear as on the eye the sun ;
So dazzling it doth dim, and bears the mind
Along, unconscious of the course it takes.

FITZURSE.

He's very dangerous—his speech is serpent-like—
It charms but to destroy ! Were he but dumb
I then could master him. I fear this peace is short.

DE TRACY.

Ha ! the King's brow doth cloud.

A'BECKET.

The kiss of peace refused !
My Liege, why so ?

HENRY.

A vow I made precludes its gift.

A'BECKET.

The conference, then, is o'er. The bond,
Without the seal, were valueless. My Liege !
My Liege ! think well of this. 'Tis a slight gift—
A gift when given not gone, so rich the return
'Twill yield. My King, retract thy vow ; the Church
Permits. A'Becket then is yours—we must be friends.

Aside.] I must not sue. I, who so soon enthroned
Shall be, high over all earth's kings.

Still my country speaks.

To HENRY.]

Your realm demands it, a people's groans mourn
Their sad miseries ; and a distracted land—
Most eloquent counsellor in my cause—
Pleads loud for it.

HENRY.

It may not be. What England says
Must be—our word, our bond.

FITZURSE.

My Liege, the price
That's paid cancels the bond. Here, see the smiling face
Of lovely peace; there, dire war's frowning brow,
With all its attendant horrors.

HENRY.

You counsel peace,
Young Lord, who ever were for war? You lack not
courage!
Has he sought to bribe you, my tried follower?

A'BECKET, *scornfully*.

To bribe!

FITZURSE.

To bribe! Could I be bribed, my brow had never worn
This deep gash which now it bears, a valued trophy
Of the day I met the blow, were else my King's.

HENRY.

True, true, I've wronged you!

A'BECKET, *aside*.

Not the first wrong you've done him.
Fouled in his birth, not even though King,
Canst thou cleanse him.

HENRY.

Take here my thanks, young Lord!
While thus reminded of a deed, till now forgotten—
One you should be proud of, wear this sword,
For years my constant friend! As I have worn it
So I'll wear you; ever my counsellor
Both in Court and camp. When your King finds
True merit, he rewards it. Is it not so, A'Becket?

A'BECKET.

I thought so once, my Liege, and much it pains me,
That this hour should be a witness against that thought.

HENRY.

It shall not be so. The kiss of peace may not be yours,
A vow made in an hasty hour precludes it.
But come unto my heart. [*They embrace.*
My Lords, this day does unto England bear
Unheard of blessings. A prosperous people
Are the greatest riches which a land can boast.

To A'BECKET.]

Herein do I restore you to my love,
As I already have unto your honors.
I must away to Normandy. Preserve my realm
In peace. Farewell to all!

A'BECKET.

Farewell! most gracious Majesty!
May Heaven's choicest blessings be with you,
And honor, love, and a long life be yours.

HENRY.

Thanks unto all! Farewell!

Exeunt the KING and his attendants except FITZURSE.

A'BECKET.

My friends, we will prepare for our return
To Canterbury. [*FITZURSE approaches.*

Young Lord, you have well spoken;
And though I had preferred some other's voice,
My thanks are due to you.

FITZURSE.

Father, receive it as an act
Was due from one has wronged you much,

Owes you great favors. May I not claim your pardon
For the past, since you have said that all foregone is for-
gotten?

A'BECKET.

Pardon, I may not grant. You have my prayers
That you will ever walk in honor's footsteps.
Whate'er the toil in tracing them, they at least
Will lead to pleasure and to peace.

FITZURSE.

It shall be so. When may I wait on you?

A'BECKET.

When I return to England.

FITZURSE.

Not before? my suit is urgent.

A'BECKET.

And my cares are many.

FITZURSE.

None, none so great as mine—

A young heart's hopes.

A'BECKET.

Rash youth, touch not upon that chord,
Whole seas of misery are in those words!

FITZURSE.

Hast known love? Thou knowest what I do feel.
Past words, past thought, for reason holds no sway,
When love gives birth to hope!

A'BECKET.

Love! profane not with thy lips
That holy word. 'Twas made for angels!
Mortals know it not!

FITZURSE.

What mean these words?

A'BECKET.

Impatient, wayward, and wilful from thy youth,
I hoped thou wouldst to honor grow.
Unknown to you, I nursed you in your infancy,
Watched o'er your boyhood, and when to manhood grown,
Sought to instill all generous sentiments.
You know not how I loved you!
I had a niece, the only being who did bear my blood,
Sole surviving daughter of a sister loved
Only as angels are; as bright, as good,
As beautiful as they.

You wooed her.

Deeming you were the soul of honor, your faults
The faults of generous youth—your suit I favored.
The lady's eyes found grace was in your form,
And gave admittance in her guileless heart
To your too potent wooing.

And I was glad,

For you I had preferred to all the glittering throng
Who wooed my niece. I looked on this
As the sheet-anchor of my declining years.
I thought that my solicitude for you
Would be rewarded by your tender care
Of her I loved so well—that she would be
Incentive unto you to every noble deed—
And thus together you would walk in honor.
But no! not so! The lurking devil showed
His cloven foot. Your angel read deceit
Upon your brow, and handed me this letter.

FITZURSE.

Ha! is it so? What fiend was't gave it her?
Give! give it me! that I may track him down!

A'BECKET.

Nay, it matters not! Thou ownest its truth
By thy hasty words—the heart that's new in crime
Betrays itself. Thou canst not wear the coronet
Had been thine. Dishonor now is seared
Upon thy brow.

FITZURSE, *touching his sword.*

To me!

A'BECKET.

Darest threaten!

The curse of Rome—

FITZURSE, *kneeling.*

Stay! stay! those dreadful words!

A'BECKET.

I do relent. I will not curse thee, tho' thou merit it.
The serpent's curse was on thee from thy birth!
Thy wrongs array thee 'gainst thy fellow-men!
Kneel then! though thou mayest sting my heel
('Tis all thou canst do), I will not bruise thy head.

FITZURSE *kneels.*]

Kneel at this whitened sepulchre of lofty aspirations
And repent. It is the holy teaching of my Church,
Repentance never comes too late to any man. !

END OF ACT IV.

ACT V.

SCENE FIRST.

Hall in Palace at Canterbury—A'Becket alone.

A'BECKET.

Land of my birth! my weal, my woe! all hail!
All hail! You yet shall be my grave! My grave?
And have I toiled through life for this?—for this
Alone?
Is this the whole of man's brief tale, the sum
Of his mortality?
Of dust we're born, like dust we're buffeted
By fortune's fickle winds, at most but fourscore years or so,
And then to dust return. Oh! sickening thought!
The loathsome grave and its vile myriads
Disgust man with his nature!
But that a higher destiny awaits
The soul immortal, here doth own at best
A slight brief tenancy, how worse than valueless
Were life, that principle which still doth live
Through all the changes of mortality—
This it must be! yea! yea! 'tis this that makes
Us struggle through the ills on us attend,
From cradled infancy to the grave of age.

LUCILLE *enters*.

Ah! my fair Lucille! What? tears in your old home?
Give not way to grief! 'tis the medicine
Of the soul, wisely administered,
By an unerring hand.

LUCILLE.

I know this well, dear Father, and its truth
I feel—but my grief is so heavy! 'Tis dreadful
Thus to have the heart's first flowers crushed
In their bloom! To have the name, I once so fondly hoped
That I should proudly bear, dishonor's synonym!—
Alas! my poor, weak woman heart! I thought
I had o'ermastered thee, but thou o'ermasterest me!
Thy tendrils are too firmly fixed within my breast,
For even the direst wrongs to root it out.

A'BECKET.

True 'tis, my child, that it is dreadful;
But the hand that wounds will heal.

LUCILLE.

Oh, would it might! For since that most dread hour
When I first learnt his perfidy—Ah me,
That I should call it so!—Not even one instant
Have I been alone. My grief is everywhere—
Its melancholy notes I hear at dawn,
High o'er the lark's; the woods by day,
But with its plaintive melody are filled;
And when night comes, her hideous birds
Haunt me, where'er I wander—and then
When sleep's sweet hours draw nigh, most frightful dreams
Hover about my couch in hosts. Oh, Father!
Life is dreadful at such cost!

A'BECKET.

Join the gay crowd,

My child. Call to memory's chambers
Blithesome thoughts; their fragrance will refresh
Your wounded spirit, and healing bring thy soul.
Time is the grand disposer of events—the hour
Of joy will come!

LUCILLE.

The hour of joy!

A'BECKET.

That was my word—
Remember, you are A'Becket's niece.

LUCILLE.

I will,

And be *his* child. I'll think those scenes of pleasure,—
Long since flown—sounded depths, I thought were
* fathomless,
And seek for rock-based charms.

A'BECKET.

'Twere well! But leave me, child!
One who hath wronged me much
Craves a brief interview, and comes e'en now.

LUCILLE.

Is it Fitzurse, that you'd not have me here?
Forgive him! Oh, forgive him, Father, for my sake!
Alas! that ever I should have betrayed
The Lord I loved!—but was he not unworthy?
How wretched must he be, his fair fame gone!
Spare him! oh! spare him, Father!

A'BECKET.

Be comforted, my child.

I will! I will! [*Kissing her.*] There! there! be comforted!

I'll leave him to himself—Let conscience be his monitor.

[*Exit* LUCILLE.]

Alas! sweet maid, child of misfortune!
Untimely born, you cost a widow'd mother's life.
But here he comes. How can I e'er forget the past?
By him this fair field ravaged—all its flowers felled!

Enter FITZURSE.] What would you, Sir? be brief

FITZURSE.

Then, to be brief, your pardon.

A'BECKET.

Take it, with this request,
That we may meet no more.

FITZURSE.

There is a name I fain would lisp.

A'BECKET.

Nay, name it not, it is too pure for lips
Like thine.

FITZURSE.

Oh! say, she is well!

A'BECKET.

As well as one
So deeply wronged can be. Farewell! farewell!
You have my pardon. Pray, leave me now. You call
To memory life's heaviest hours, which I would fain for-
get.

FITZURSE.

Oh! grant that I may labor in your cause;
Restore myself unto your favor; regain your niece's love.

A'BECKET.

Art mad?

FITZURSE.

I trust not, Father. May I not see her?

A'BECKET.

Go gaze upon the lily the whirlwind hath crushed;
You'll see her image without paining her.

Leave me, Sir! [Stands lost in thought.

FITZURSE, *aside*.

Alas! why had King Henry's will more weight
Than my dishonor?

Aloud.] 'Tis well! I will! Farewell!
Ruler of England, and Lord Primate, too!
If Fitzurse lives, this hour you shall rue. [*Exit.*

Enter SALISBURY.

SALISBURY.

My Lord, those Bishops did refuse to take the oath,
And straightway sailed for Normandy.

A'BECKET.

Is't so? Now comes a storm!

SALISBURY.

The young prince doth refuse
To meet you, and commands that you remain
Within the Church's verge.

A'BECKET.

From Prince Henry, this?
I had not believed it, came it not from you;
He ever was to me a son!

SALISBURY.

All those of note
Who welcomed your return, are summoned
To give bail, upon a charge of base sedition!

A'BECKET.

This from King Henry? Well, I can thunder too!
I'll issue an excommunication
Against his dearest friends: the Lords De Vere,
Clifford, and Montreuil. See this done upon the instant.
Exit SALISBURY. *Enter* ALBERT, ushering in REGINALD DE
WARENNE and GERVASE DE CORNHILL.

Welcome! my noble Lords, what is your pleasure?

REGINALD.

Straight as your question is our reply:
We come as ministers of the King, demanding why

On York's Archbishop you have passed
Sentence of suspension, and against London
And Salisbury, excommunication?

A'BECKET.

We recognize no right, either in yourselves,
Or him, whose ministers ye claim to be,
My reasons to demand for this, or any other act!

REGINALD.

Is it come to this? Indeed,* our Henry is but King
In name! Mean you, my Lord, to bring both fire and
sword
Upon our afflicted land?

A'BECKET.

My acts will answer that.

CORNHILL.

The Lords De Broc, and Nigel de Sackville,
What of them and their many friends?

A'BECKET.

But this—since by their acts they've brought
Heaven's thunder upon their heads; they must find
In other place than this, the power shall shield
Them from its fury.

Go ask their injured tenantry
What they deserve! Nay, nay, nay, nay, not ask;
But look upon the ruined father
And his polluted child! You'll find there's many such.
Let this be my reply: the interest of my land
Is my first thought. Henceforth know, noble Lords,
That as the populace of England need a friend
To guard them from oppression,

That friend they have in me!

REGINALD.

By this we know your feelings towards ourselves;
And nothing's left to say, but fare-you-well! [*Exeunt.*]

A'BECKET.

Farewell to you! What mean these haughty nobles?
Shall their cold words, or their unmanly threats
Turn me from duty's path—even tho' the cries
Of injured innocence fell not each instant
On my ear? Oh! poor nobility, thou wronged name!
Thy nature has descended to the serf;
There! there alone, we find you, *robed in rags!*
Henry will know me now, for York, the chronicler
Of each day's pettiest acts, has fled to Baieux;
Where England's King, like the huge monarch
Of all creeping things, will,
For the pleasure of the hour, make him but one day's
feast.

Fie on such men! Ho! Albert, ho! [*Enter ALBERT.*]

Bear this to Lord Salisbury instantly.

Command immediate execution of my will.

Exit ALBERT.]

Fitzurse is dangerous. Banishment or the grave,
His choice!

Enter SALISBURY, in haste.

SALISBURY.

Father, why this?

A'BECKET.

'Tis my will, my son!

SALISBURY.

Fitzurse hath friends!

A'BECKET.

So hath A'Becket. Albert, bid my Lord of Blois
Come hither!

SALISBURY.

Father, pray hear me! He once was held
By you in honor. For no known offence has fallen
From your favor!

A'BECKET.

Men's offences are not always known
To the world!

SALISBURY.

Most true, my Lord!

But, upon what pretence
May I fulfil your order?

A'BECKET.

On what pretence?
On none! Hast lived so long with me and not know
This? But you are slothful in this business.
I must have those about me who will act
My very thoughts!

SALISBURY.

And is this my reward?

A'BECKET.

For what?

SALISBURY.

Unbounded love for you! Great sufferings,
And service from my boyhood until now!
Father, I will away, and bid him hence;
You're over anxious; this would make you
Ungenerous.

A'BECKET.

Poor boy! it is enough. I've worn you
Ever by my side, as the warrior wears his sword;
A graceful weapon, thinking the blade true steel,

But on the contest, finding it poor stuff,
Casts it away!

I wish no meanly tempered weapon
For my use!

SALISBURY.

Pardon, my Father, I spoke not thus
In aught save reverence. I would not you should do
What the world might scan. Men's deeds live after
them!

A'BECKET.

True, true, you're right, my friend! They do! they do!
At least some men's do. I was too hasty.
Give me the order; mine I would have printed
In the type of justice! for what is therein clothed,
Shall until Doomsday live! Bid him to me.

Exit SALISBURY.]

[*Enter* BLOIS.

BLOIS.

Father, news has arrived, Fitzurse has fled
The realm in rage! denouncing you and yours,
And swearing vengeance!

A'BECKET.

Indeed! and whither?

BLOIS.

I fear to Baieux.

A'BECKET.

To Baieux! To horse! to horse!
There's danger in his thunder! Speed to the nearest
port!
Here, take this seal! Arrest him on the instant!
Oh! would that I were young again! I'd post myself,
But that this poor mortality is too feeble grown
To bear my soul's desires; messengers
I will dispatch to every sea-port town,

With orders to arrest him, though at cost of life!
He, of all men, I fear—for he is false!
And falsehood is more deadly in its touch
Than dagger's venom'd point.

Enter SALISBURY.] Salisbury, what now?

SALISBURY.

Fitzurse has fled to Henry!

A'BECKET.

How know you this?

SALISBURY.

Your trusty Hugh is here.

Enter HUGH.

A'BECKET.

How know you this?

HUGH.

I saw him take a fisher's boat,
And, cursing you, bid them spread all sail
And steer for France. He knew me not.
Deeming his errand hostile unto you,
My Lord—a marc the bribe—I straight despatched,
With those I knew to trust, the fastest craft
That England's waters boast, with orders to arrest him.

A'BECKET.

Well done, my son! But were your orders sealed?

HUGH.

They were. When last you went to France you gave me
this,
Your seal.—[*Showing ring.*]

A'BECKET.

Well thought in thee; bring me the earliest news of him.
Farewell, my sons! Pray leave me all awhile,
I am o'erwrought to-day. [Exeunt.]

Fitzurse fled to Baieux!

Dread news for me! his voice has too much power
With our King.

Ye noiseless ministers,
Who do in silence watch o'er the troubled spirits
Of this world! oh, guard with me this hour!
Dread horror strikes deep into my careworn heart.
Must I give o'er—all frustrated my schemes!
All efforts vain! Toiled have I oft
By aid of Heaven's hosts from dawn to dawn,
Ever, but brief and faint like glow-worm's glimmer
Hath proved my rest.

Pleasures I've tasted—
So the worldlings say—they were as dear-bought,
And when won, as trite, as galley slave's reward.
Rest! rest!—there is no rest for me! Ambition,
Bitter, bitter are thy fruits! Man fights for bubbles,
And but bubbles gains.

This is the song of all—
And yet 'tis dear, as dear as is his mistress' voice,
Heard by the lover in his midnight dreams.
Ambition! avarice! glory! love!
Ye all but golden lures, do shine and sparkle
Like night's spirits on your way, marking a course
Uncertain at the best. Phantoms which all men chase,
Yet all elude. A brief short hour of joy
Of life's long days, is all that I have known.

Enter LUCILLE—A'BECKET entranced.

Beautiful spirit! thou who leddest my heart,
'Mid heavenly harmonies, to those rich-gemmed courts
Where loving spirits meet, bring comfort, courage,
And a firm resolve from thy blessed realms to me,
That I may bear the trials of this hour, and rule,

Where others reign. Ah! my fair child, is't thou?
Did I then but dream?

LUCILLE.

Alas, you did! for I am yet but mortal.

A'BECKET.

Nay, say not so. Consider, sweet, those words
But as the air, passes unheeded by.

LUCILLE.

Why so, dear Father?
Should we then shame to own our loves?

A'BECKET.

Not so;

But rather keep them to ourselves, as gems
The miser stores, unknown to the world, to feast
Upon in solitude.

Come, child, within.

A trumpet heard.]

There's news,

I hear, from France—will need my care.

Attend on me

To-morrow. Good-night! good-night!

LUCILLE.

Grant me but this—forgiveness for Fitzurse,
For though I would not wed him,

I have my heart

O'ertasked, and fancy I may have wronged him.

A'BECKET.

Nay! nay! it is too true! too true!

Hereafter we will speak of this. Good-night,

Sweet child! Kind angels hover o'er thee! [*Exeunt.*]

SCENE SECOND.

Hall in Baieux Palace.

Enter HENRY and ARCHBISHOP OF YORK.

HENRY.

My Lord Archbishop, what brings you here from York?

YORK.

Suspended by the Primate of your realm,
I could but flee to you.

HENRY.

Suspended! on what grounds?

YORK.

Grounds, my Liege? did this A'Becket e'er require
Grounds? His will! his will! my Liege—no more.

HENRY.

Are you alone the sufferer by this act?

YORK.

No! would to Heaven I were! London
And Salisbury both have fled the realm
And hasten hither. Their excommunication
Reached them also.

HENRY.

Impossible! Is't true?

How know you this?

YORK.

From their own lips I heard it.

HENRY.

What would this churlish priest? What needs he more?

YORK.

Methinks, your crown. You'll ne'er know peace, my
Liege,
While this A'Becket lives.

HENRY.

Raze from the calendar the day he came to life :
Blot from my statute-book his seals. Oh, Heavens !
Am I but king in name ?

Enter DE TRACY, DE MOREVILLE, *and* SIR RICHARD BRITO.

HENRY.

What news, my Lords, from England ?

DE TRACY.

My Liege, your Primate doth refuse
The Lords De Broc and Sackville to restore.

HENRY.

Indeed ! Must I endure all this ?

“Are ye all cowards,

Who do eat my bread ? Is there not one

Will free me from this turbulent priest ?”

I will to England straight. Attend on me,

My Lords.

[*Exeunt all except* DE MOREVILLE, DE TRACY, *and* BRITO.]

DE MOREVILLE.

Heard'st thou that, De Tracy ?

DE TRACY.

Ay, and will act on it ! Sir Hugh De Moreville,
You've no love for A'Becket ?

DE MOREVILLE.

Not I ; nor you, Sir Richard.

BRITO.

Not a jot, my Lord ! but I do love my King.

DE MOREVILLE.

Say rather, yourself—fall he, fall you.

We'll meet at Saltswood, and should you Fitzurse see,

Bring him with you. His wrongs demand revenge.
Your hands—

Here do we swear to rid him of this Priest.
[*Exeunt.*

SCENE THIRD.

Wood near the Archbishop's Palace.

FITZURSE *enters.*

Why bend my footsteps hither, on their way to death?
When last they trod these shady woods, her voice
Fell like the music of harmonious streams,
Taking their sinuous way through flowery brakes.
Then spring was in her bloom, and my glad heart
Melodiously sang, tuned to the key
Her choristers warbled in. Now all
In winter's icy garb is clad, and the heart's blood
Then flowed so warm and fast to every note
Of suffering—now is all curdled
By my many wrongs, and throbs but with the hope
Of keen revenge. Come on! come on!
Though thou shouldst strike a benefactor's heart!
Come to thy work! thy longed-for work!
Be steady thou, my hand! no paltering now!
Did he not stay me on my way to France,
And force return to England? Now I will wait on him.

Enter DE MOREVILLE.

Well met, De Moreville! What meaneth this, old friend?
Your looks estranged, and on your brow I read
The workings of a troubled spirit.

DE MOREVILLE.

The poor old man !
A'Becket is doomed !

FITZURSE.

The poor old man ! A'Becket doomed !
What of that ?
Yet how so ? Why should I feel for him ?
He never felt
For me, in all my sufferings.

DE MOREVILLE.

What sufferings ?

FITZURSE.

Sufferings ! The sharp pangs of the young heart—
The heart that feels more keenly in one hour
Than age's in a year ! Remember, my dear Lord,
You broached this business first to me ;
Whate'er had been my thought, it knew no word—
no act.

DE MOREVILLE.

True, true, but thou art warm ! I come prepared,
And with me other of our friends, to do
The deed our King shall thank us for.
Wilt thou be one of us ?

FITZURSE.

I will !

ALBERT passes by.]

Ho ! there !

Say to your master

The Lord Fitzurse craves his ear.

Enter DE BROC.]

Well met, my Lord ;

Come not De Tracy and Sir Richard with you ?

To DE MOREVILLE.] They did appoint this hour.

DE MOREVILLE.

They did, but should they fail!

FITZURSE.

They'll never fail! You're pale, De Moreville;
Dost thou fear?

DE MOREVILLE.

De Moreville fear! Lo! where they come.

Enter DE TRACY and SIR RICHARD.

DE TRACY.

My Lords, are ye prepared?

FITZURSE.

We but await your coming.
Who shall demand the conference?

BRITO.

Yourself!

You have most cause for hate, most reason
For the deed.

FITZURSE.

True, true, I have most reason.
Revenge doth urge me on! while ye have
But your King's dark hints.

BRITO.

Which unto me's enough.

Enter ALBERT.

ALBERT.

My Lord awaits you, Sir.

FITZURSE.

I will attend on him.

Wait ye without.

Exeunt.]

SCENE FOURTH.

Palace at Canterbury—A'Becket's Room.

A'BECKET.

Why comes he back? I do mistrust the man!
How heavy is the air—it bodes a storm!
My children all away! would they were here!
No news from Rome to-day! nor Henry's Court!
'Tis strange! 'tis very strange! Things all seem
Out of tune—even my heart beats
In less healthful time than is its wont;
But I am old, and cannot look in age
For that which youth may boast. Lo! where he comes
With stealthy step; why not with manly tread?—
That herald of an honest heart! I will not fear
Him, nor his friends, come they in hosts!

FITZURSE, *bowing*.

Most Holy Father;
The King——

A'BECKET.

He would have known better than to have sent
You to me! Would you deceive me? When saw you
The King? Dost thou not fear my rage?

FITZURSE.

There's terror in the whirlwind's, but I see it not;
Why, then, should I fear yours?

A'BECKET.

Audacious youth!
What would you, Sir? Your errand, quickly—here, on
this spot—
And instantly; though I had rather it should be
From any tongue, than thine!

A traitor's voice so angers me!

FITZURSE.

York, London, and Salisbury, at Henry's feet
Have fallen.

A'BECKET.

There let them lie! What's that to me?
Yet speak.

FITZURSE.

The King commands they be restored to honor.

A'BECKET.

And you have borne this message! What, should I not
comply?

FITZURSE.

His anger!

A'BECKET.

Thunder is heard.]

His anger! Hearest thou that blast?
Aside.] What bodes this wintry thunder?

FITZURSE.

I do.

A'BECKET.

On it, that Monarch's anger rides,
Whom I alone do fear.

FITZURSE.

To Henry, this?

A'BECKET.

To Henry! ay, to Henry!
I've spoken it to Heaven; why not to Henry?

FITZURSE, *aside*.

There is but this——

A'BECKET.

What sayst? Speak out! You fear
To bear my answer to this mock king! Poor slave,

I pity thee! Oh! the worst master of the slave
Is—slave!

FITZURSE.

To me?

A'BECKET.

Ay, Sir! To you!
Enough; leave me! I am weary of this;
You have my answer!

FITZURSE.

A slave!

A'BECKET.

That was my word! Leave me!

FITZURSE, *aside*.

Now will I do it. No, no, once more I'll see Lucille;
There'll be an hour for this. [*Exit*.

Enter MATILDE and LUCILLE.

A'BECKET.

My child! my child! my children, both!
Thus e'er come Heaven's rays in gloomiest hours!
All safe! I feared for you; so wild the storm!
My heart is softer than it was of yore;
So grows the oak with age.

MATILDE.

You are troubled, father;
What new grief?

A'BECKET.

One I once loved was here,
But oh! he's fallen, like the roseate cloud
That sinks away in darkness; the admiration
Of my wondering eye, begrimed and black with sin.

LUCILLE.

But others come, as roseate as was this.

A'BECKET.

This from thee, sweet child of sorrow? I had not sought
From thy fair brow, philosophy! But grief
Is a chastener to the virtuous heart,
From which, when bruised, as from the rose
When crushed, the richest perfume springs.
I must prepare for vespers. Rest ye here.

Enter FITZURSE. [*Exit A'BECKET and MATILDE.*

LUCILLE.

Fitzurse!

FITZURSE.

The same.

LUCILLE.

Aside.] I must bear up. [*To FITZURSE.*] In name, but
not in nature.

What do you here? And are they, then, your friends—
Those men with scowling brows, and lips which woo
The smiles they may not wear? for Nature
Never will be so belied, as paint
Upon the foul heart's face those charms the virtuous only
wear!

But speak; what would you?

I fear, no good.

FITZURSE, *kneeling.*

Earth's best gift, your love?

LUCILLE.

Arise, Sir! leave me! lest my frown shall strike
Upon thy steeled bosom, with such fanged darts,
Thy soul shall flee their power, and it shall fall
But on a lifeless corse.

FITZURSE

Lucille!

LUCILLE.

That tone!

The wind thus sweetly whispers, that doth bear
The gale. Ah, me! Ah, me!

FITZURSE.

One word, and I'll no more :
Your love or uncle's life!

LUCILLE.

Villain! Help! ho!

Enter A'BECKET, SALISBURY, BLOIS, and others.

A'BECKET.

What means this, Sir? How came you here?
Salisbury, guard thou Lucille.

FITZURSE.

Recall thy word—her hand!

A'BECKET.

Never! How dare you this?

FITZURSE.

This! ay, more!

A'BECKET.

Presumptuous man! You know the past!
How dare you threaten?

FITZURSE *lays his hand on his sword.*

Threaten! beware, Sir!

Lest I more than threaten!

A'BECKET.

Audacious youth!

The wrath of Heaven be on you! Begone, Sir!
Leave me! my hour has not yet come!

FITZURSE *aside.*

But will ere night—at vespers. They are too strong for
me. [*Exit.*

BLOIS.

Villain! I'll after him!

A'BECKET.

Nay, nay, my son!

There is no fear for us. The Church's shield will ward
All earthly blows; and when Heaven's falls,
It will, whate'er our heed.

Let's on to vespers.

My daughters, come with me; there's something
Sacred in a virgin's charms, since the first birth
Of time. So sacred, he whose warrior

I am enrolled, called one *His mother*.

[*Exeunt*,

SCENE FIFTH.

Vespers—The Chapel.

Enter A'BECKET, SALISBURY, BLOIS, MATILDE, LUCILLE,
and attendants.

BLOIS.

Close ye the portals! spare nor bolt nor bar!

A'BECKET.

Nay, nay, my son!

BLOIS.

Oh, Father! be advised this once!

Villany lurks around! No shrine so sacred
But it will pollute with its foul breath.

MATILDE.

Oh, Father! hear my prayer!

LUCILLE.

And mine! Upon my knees,
Dear Father, grant me but this? Oh, be advised!

A'BECKET.

Fear not, my children! To your love I would yield,
"But 'tis not meet that we should fortify
God's temple, like a castle."

We need no gates,
No bulwarks, and no arms! If He wills we shall live,
We will not die—if die, 'tis but for once!
And who would live, when by his Father called
Unto that home, so rich in every joy?
Hark to the vesper hymn! How like
A voice from Heaven it comes!

My blessings be with you!

Low music—they kneel.]

*He ascends the steps of the High Altar. Enter the five
conspirators and twelve companions.*

DE BROC.

Where is the traitor, Thomas A'Becket?

No answer.]

Where is the Archbishop?

A'BECKET, *turning round.*

"Here am I, no traitor, but a priest,
Ready to suffer in the name of Him
Who redeemed me." But what do ye here in arms?

DE BROC.

Take off the censures from the Prelates,
Or instant death!

A'BECKET.

Never! so help me Heaven!
Put up your swords! Who dares insult his God?
Fitzurse, stand back! I have done you many a kindness;
Touch me not! by Heaven's arm alone I'll fall,
Never by thine! Think ye that I fear you?

Kneel at this altar, which ye have so foul'd,
Lest that your souls alone may cleanse these stains,
And make atonement for this sacrilege.

FITZURSE.

Fly then! oh, fly! My oath! my oath!

A'BECKET.

No, never!

I am prepared to die.

DE BROC, *striking at him.*

Fly! or you are dead!

Or else be borne, a prisoner, to the King!

FITZURSE *strikes him.*

LUCILLE.

Hold! what, thou, Fitzurse!

FITZURSE.

There—die!

*The blow glances from A'BECKET on LUCILLE, who has
rushed to shield him, as she exclaims—*

Fitzurse!

FITZURSE.

What have I done?

A'BECKET *supports her as she falls, saying:*

Stand off! What hast thou done?

My child! my child! earth was not dear to thee.

Thus will we unto Heaven. [*Still supporting her.*

Unto the attendants.]

My children, sheathe your swords,
Fitzurse, sheathe thine, and let these do the deed!
Thy mother drank my heart's life in our tender youth;
There is none left for thee. Fair Rosamond
Had been my bride; an honored, virgin bride,

Had not thy father, Henry, our King, won her
From her truth, and steeped her in dishonor.

FITZURSE.

Fair Rosamond my mother ! [*Looking at his sword.*]

A'BECKET.

Alas ! it is too true.

FITZURSE, *to his sword.*

Come ! do thy work !

Thou wert his gift who gave me life ; that gone
With her fair fame—my unknown mother's,
Whom I have worshipped as a saint in heaven,
I sheathe thee in my heart ! Her life's blood on thy blade ;
With thee I wed, Lucille !

Stabs himself and falls at LUCILLE'S feet.]

Now are we one ! [*Dies.*]

A'BECKET.

Oh ! that my loved Liege, Henry, should have known
This hour ! How do youth's sins track man unto the
grave !

Turning to Conspirators.]

He'll curse ye, Sirs, who have done this foul deed ;
And cast ye to dishonor ! while, with repentant ashes
On his head—bare-footed, scourges on his back—
He'll walk, and prostrate lie before the shrine
Of him who now doth fall but to be canonized ;
And when his hour shall come ; (but this, I charge you,
Under pain of Saint A'Becket's ire,
Ne'er to disclose till then !)

His queen, vile Eleanor,
Inciting foes ! for she will ne'er forgive his frailties !
His realm disjoined ! Sons disobedient !
In rebellion, all ; with none but hired menials
Near his infected couch, this mighty monarch

In vile rags shall die! No regal state, no honor, and no
love!—

Not e'en the love of one poor heart, for him
Whose every love was lust, and love of self!—

Yet, had I lived, I would have saved him
From this last dishonor.

Come, murder, have thy way! My life fast ebbs.

To God, St. Mary, and the Saints who are
The patrons of the Church, and to St. Denis,
I do commend myself and the Church's cause.

You've done your worst!

Ye Norman Lords, here dies the Anglo-Saxons' hope ;

To rise hereafter in a far Western land,

Whence like the sun, with Freedom's glorious rays,

It shall illume the Wide, Wide World!

They kneel around.]

[He dies.]

FINIS.

